

## **Report to the Local Plan Cabinet Committee**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Report reference:** *LPC-007-2012/13*  
**Date of meeting:** *18 February 2013*

**Portfolio:** Planning

**Subject:** Local Plan – Progress & Budget update

**Responsible Officer:** Amanda Thorn (01992 564543)

**Democratic Services Officer:** Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) To note progress on the Local Plan; and
- (2) To note the expenditure on preparing the Local Plan to date in 2012/13 and the estimates for further expenditure over the coming months.

### **Executive Summary:**

Progress on the Local Plan has accelerated in recent months, with the Community Choices: Issues & Options consultation period being held between July and October 2012. This resulted in 4,080 responses being received on behalf of 6,331 people. Detailed analysis is now underway by the Forward Planning team.

Further evidence base work is required around population figures, economic development, flood risk and transport. Further detailed investigation of some matters may also be required as the analysis of consultation responses progresses.

As of 30 January 2013, £262,930 has been spent from existing budgets on the preparation of the Local Plan. Identified expenditure is broadly within estimated budgets, and unforeseen amounts can be absorbed into the existing District Development Fund (DDF) budget at this stage. Further review of the overall budget is likely to be required in future.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

This report is provided for update purposes, and no decisions are required.

### **Other Options for Action:**

No decisions are recommended within this report, therefore no alternative decisions exist.

### **Report:**

#### Local Plan Progress

1. Production of a new Local Plan in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework is a key corporate priority. The Council is required to work swiftly towards the adoption of the Local Plan to make adequate provision for growth whilst still protecting the

existing character of the District.

2. Initial consultation on a series of broad questions was carried out via the Community Visioning exercise from November 2010. The first formal stage of public consultation, the Community Choices: Issues & Options, was held between July and October 2012. The Council received a total of 4,080 responses on behalf of 6,331 people. At this stage of the plan-making process, this is a high number of responses to have received. Officers are currently analysing the responses and will present the findings to Members in due course.

3. Three Members' workshops are being held from January to March 2013 to enable a discussion about the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework and its implications for the Local Plan, and to start to introduce Members to some of the key issues being raised from the consultation process.

4. Subject to agreement by Local Plan Cabinet Committee, It is intended that the next round of public consultation (Preferred Options) will take place in Autumn 2013.

#### Evidence Base Update

5. Appendix 1 shows the evidence base studies that have been commissioned to support the Local Plan. There are a number of pieces of work still underway, or shortly to be commissioned to provide additional information to support the Local Plan:

(a) Population & Household projections – commissioned by Essex Planning Officers Association to provide District level population projections for each of the authorities in Essex. Phase 4, which takes into account the recent Census figures, is due to be published in March 2013.

(b) Strategic Housing Market Assessment – review currently underway by ORS. Further report also commissioned to consider the housing needs of an ageing population. Reports due to be completed March 2013.

(c) Economic Development – independent consultant has been commissioned to review and update information around economic development to provide an up-to-date view on the position within the District.

(d) Strategic Flood Risk Assessment: Level 2 – URS have been commissioned to undertake detailed flood risk modelling work for proposed areas of development.

(e) Transport Assessment – consultants not yet appointed. Commission expected during March 2013, with this work providing detailed assessment of the transport impacts of the emerging options within the Local Plan.

6. In addition, URS (different section to 5.d. above) have recently been appointed to provide advice on the preparation of the Sustainability Appraisal, and to undertake the Habitats Regulations Assessment required to support the emerging Local Plan.

#### Local Plan Resources

7. Cabinet agreed a revised budget to deliver the Local Plan on 11 June 2012. A total of £262,930 has been spent within this financial year as at 30 January 2013. Appendix 2 shows a summary of this expenditure.

8. Expenditure to date on specific items is broadly within estimates provided in June 2012. There has been some slippage in expenditure as there has been some delay in the

previously proposed timetable. A total of £610,000 is available for this financial year, approximately half of which will need to be re-profiled to 2013/14 to take into account this delay.

9. There is an additional item related to the high number of consultation responses received, which has meant that an external agency was commissioned to input the responses to a database. This single cost amounted to £24,115, against an original estimate of £5,000 for this type of work.

10. Fortismere Associates have been commissioned to provide project management support up to October 2013, and the additional costs of this were recognised in the review of the Local Plan budget in June 2012. The slippage that has occurred to the overall timetable has not yet been fully quantified, however, it is possible that the existing arrangement with Fortismere Associates will need to be extended, bringing with it a further call on the Local Plan budget.

11. In addition, the Chief Executive and the Portfolio Holder have recently permitted amendments to two temporary positions within Forward Planning, in order to further boost the team. There are currently three vacancies, all of which are temporary positions. An advertisement for the Senior Planning Officer (temporary to October 2014) closes on 14 February, and it is hoped an appointment will be made. Two additional vacancies are for the Forward Planning Assistant and the Information & Technical Officer, both currently available to October 2014.

12. It has now been agreed that the Forward Planning Assistant (Grade 4) can be upgraded to a Planning Officer (Grade 6) post, and that this and the Information & Technical Officer post should be further extended to December 2014. The additional cost implications of this will be £47,300, which will be funded in the immediate future by the Local Plan budget. Whilst there are sufficient funds available to cover this additional expenditure at this point, there may be a need to review and further supplement the budget at a later date.

13. During the Community Choices: Issues & Options consultation period it became apparent that the online software for submission of responses was not as easy to use as had been previously understood. There are a number of options now available, including working with Northgate to adjust the system, using in-house alternatives or procuring an external alternative. There is a significant amount of work to be undertaken on which of the above may be the most suitable option, but it is possible that additional expenditure may occur as a result.

#### **Resource Implications:**

Expenditure on delivering the Local Plan is broadly within current estimates, although attention is drawn to a possible shortfall later in the DDF period.

#### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

Preparation of a Local Plan is required by the National Planning Policy Framework and associated regulations.

The Council must achieve an adopted Local Plan as quickly as possible following the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework and the revocation of the Regional Spatial Strategy.

#### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

The revised Local Plan will achieve sustainable development.

**Consultation Undertaken:**

None.

**Background Papers:**

C-006-2012/13 – Local Plan Budget Requirements 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15.

**Impact Assessments:**

Risk Management

The preparation of the Local Plan must be adequately resourced to allow timely adoption of the revised document. The implications for the Council of not having a revised Local Plan in place include, but are not restricted to, loss of planning decisions at appeal, loss of Green Belt land, inadequate provision for growth and insufficient guidance for investors in the District.

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?* No

*Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?* N/A

*What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?*  
Equality impact assessment not required as no decisions are being made.

*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?*  
N/A.