

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 17 February 2015

Subject: Planning Policy

Portfolio Holder: Councillor R Bassett

Recommending:

That the report of the Planning Policy Portfolio Holder be noted

Local Plan

Local Plan timetable/workshops

The Local Development Scheme agreed by Cabinet in July 2014 proposes that the next stage of consultation on the draft plan/preferred option is to run in the summer of 2015. This would be followed by analysis of the responses and the preparation of a pre-submission plan for publication in early 2016. Once we have the outputs from SHMA and Green Belt Review we will look at dates and provide members with an update.

We are looking to arrange the next Local Plan member workshop at the end of March. The exact content depends on completion of various reports that have been commissioned and updates of information we have received and impacts on our plan. We have seen from the Uttlesford examination in public the difficulties that can occur and impact of the production of the Local Plan. As soon as we have a confirmed date we will let members know via the Bulletin.

Update on key evidence work

Strategic Housing Market Assessment update: One of the key pieces of evidence work is an update of our Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) in conjunction with the other authorities within our Housing Market Area: East Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford. This work is progressing well and we expect to receive a draft final report towards the end of February with a final steering group on 2 March 2015. The timetable slipped as we commissioned two additional pieces of work: the first to ensure that the economic activity scenarios match with the appropriate job growth projections for each District, the second to run a scenario based on intercensal population change which would more assess the projections for migration. We obtained agreement from the other three authorities to commission this work in December and this is now being used as the basis for identifying the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN). The consultants are now looking at housing mix and affordable housing to include in the final report. As Uttlesford recently discovered, this has become an increasingly important issue with Inspector's questioning OAN, the relationship between the housing need evidence in the SHMA and employment forecasts.

Economic and employment evidence: Hardisty Jones has provided their interim findings on economic and employment evidence to support both the Local Plan and Council's overall Economic Development Strategy. Officers have provided comments

and a meeting has been arranged to discuss comments on the interim findings. This work will need to incorporate the work commissioned by economic development on Waltham Abbey Town Centre and the Essex County Council commission for an Essex Economic Growth Strategy. Once finalised, this report will be reported to Cabinet alongside the report on the SHMA.

Green Belt Review: The fieldwork for Phase 1 of the Green Belt Review in the District to undertake a comprehensive high-level review of all Green Belt land across the District to identify its contribution to the Green Belt, as stipulated in the NPPF has now been substantially completed and is being mapped and written up. It will identify both the primary functions of the Green Belt, which deliver the national purposes, and in particular whether there are areas of the Green Belt land which no longer contribute towards the national purposes or contribute the least to these.

An officer working group meeting is scheduled in March to discuss initial findings and to feed into the report. It is then proposed to share the findings of Phase 1 with the Town and Parish Councils in accordance with the Cabinet's decision, before reporting to Cabinet on the findings and undertaking Phase 2 more detailed work. As we want to use the outcomes of the updated SFRA1 and transport accessibility work to sieve sites to inform the more detailed assessment, it is likely that this will happen immediately after the General Election with a report to June Cabinet.

This will set out the proposed methodology and work programme for Phase 2. A number of our neighbouring authorities are also currently undertaking Green Belt reviews. To ensure consistency of approach at the Cooperation for Sustainable Development Board meeting on 27th January it was agreed to share information regarding methodologies and findings of evidence base work including Green Belt reviews.

Strategic Land Availability Assessment: An update of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment has been completed as part of the Local Plan evidence base. A summary note of the findings will be placed in the bulletin.

Plan viability: The contract for the work on plan viability being undertaken by Dixon Searle Partnership, which will also inform policy choices on CIL/S106, is underway. The timetable has been revised, in discussion with the consultants, to enable the general direction from the Members' workshops on options and outcomes from strategic flood risk assessment and transport accessibility to inform the consideration of viability. Officers are meeting with the consultants on 6 February 2015.

Duty to cooperate: Officers have been meeting regularly with the appropriate authorities to consider cross boundary issues including the update to the SHMA and identifying the objectively assessed housing need, the approach to Green Belt reviews being carried out by several authorities, and identifying the functional economic area. The consultants' final SHMA report will be considered at the next officer and member group meetings to be held on 2 and 16 March respectively. At the recent Sustainable Development Board meeting members had a presentation from John McGill on current West Anglia mainline, Crossrail 2 and also a presentation from Essex County Council updating on M11 Corridor junction including Junction 7a.

Following the previous meeting held last October, Councillor Whitbread wrote to the Chairman (copied to all other members of the group) to advise that we had concerns that the emerging figure for the Objectively Assessed Housing Need for the SHMA might mean we will be unable to meet our full housing need. This is a precautionary

measure in the context of the recent planning practice guidance published on 6 October 2014 which reiterates the advice in the National Planning Policy Framework that local planning authorities should meet objectively assessed needs. Once need has been assessed the authority should take account of any constraints such as green belt which indicate that development should be restricted. The Leader has asked that the next meeting of the Member Board should discuss how the objectively assessed need could be met by the wider SHMA area.

Uttlesford Local Plan examination:

The PINS Inspector raised fundamental concerns regarding the soundness of the Uttlesford District Council's draft Local Plan. These focussed on:

- i) the housing numbers derived from an out dated SHMA and objectively assessed need for housing (OAN) and;
- ii) the potential expansion of the village Elsenham, in particular concerns about the capacity of the local road network in the absence of committed significant infrastructure improvements.

In a letter subsequently sent to Uttlesford DC on 19 December 2014, the Inspector concluded that he was not able to recommend adoption of the plan as submitted. He advised that the options for the Uttlesford District Council were either to continue the examination, but with the inevitable conclusion that he would not be able to recommend changes which would make the plan sound, or to consider withdrawing the plan. Uttlesford District Council decided to withdraw. The Council are now considering the additional evidence work required in order to address the Inspector's concerns and revising their Local Plan timetable accordingly.

Neighbourhood Plans: Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers produced a revised draft Plan following the critical friend advice received from an NPIERS examiner. Officers have met with representatives and provided informal comments and advice and are currently undertaking a screening opinion on the requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessment which is a necessary part of the process. Once this has been completed we will then need to agree with the parish whether the plan is ready to go for examination. As no objections were received following consultation, Buckhurst Hill Parish Council was designated under delegated powers on 5 December 2014 as a neighbourhood area for the purposes of making a plan. . Loughton Parish Council has recently applied for their parish to be designated and a six week consultation on this proposal will be undertaken. North Weald Bassett Parish has also submitted an application. We have received one comment from the developer of Latton Priory about the area to be designated. As a result officers met with the Parish in December to discuss this matter which will be the subject of a report to Cabinet in March.

Planning Policy Team staffing

Following appointment of the Planning Policy Manager, the structure of the rest of the team has been reviewed through a job evaluation panel undertaken in December. As a consequence we are currently advertising to appoint 2 career grade planning officers and an administrative support officer to replace the previous post holder who resigned in December. Following interviews arranged in February, we hope to be able to appoint to these posts and have a fully staffed planning policy team shortly after Easter.

Lea Valley Food Task Force Update

The partnership has been refocusing its work programme around three work streams.

Planning policy, a draft paper has been produced following consultation with neighbouring councils in Broxbourne and Enfield that explores a more coherent and coordinated approach to the glasshouse industry across local boundaries. A workshop with relevant planning officers is being convened to look at how this might be progressed operationally. London Borough of Enfield has confirmed a grant of £10,000 to enable work on this and the projects below to be supported.

Employment Bridge, this work stream is exploring ways to ensure that unemployed people in the participating council areas can be supported to access existing jobs in the industry across the Lea Valley area. Negotiations with the Dept of Work and Pensions are at an advanced stage to enable a full time secondment of an officer to One Epping Forest to manage and support this programme across three jobcentres.

Institute of Food Security, £20,000 funding from POD West Essex has been secured, with support from Harlow and Uttlesford District Councils, to commission consultants to examine the feasibility/desirability of establishing a research centre of excellence in Lea Valley. The Brief for Consultants is currently being drawn up on behalf of the Task Force by Adap+ based at the University of East Anglia.

NVQ/Glasshouse/Horticulture Qualification, the partnership is participating in a national Trail Blazer programme with LANTRA and central government to support skills development in the industry. In addition up to £35,000 from Essex County Council has been identified to potentially support the development locally of new specialised qualification specifically designed around the needs of commercial organisations linked to the industry.

EU Partnerships, the Task Force has been recently contacted by organisations representing the growing industry in Holland to potentially participate in a joint approach to EU Funding on BioBoost projects. The overall objective of BioBoost is to pave the way for de-central conversion of residual biomass to optimised, high energy density carriers, which can be utilised in large scale applications for the synthesis of transportation fuel and chemicals or directly in small-scale combined heat and power (CHP) plants. A representative of the taskforce met with possible partners from Holland and Belgium mid January to discuss further. This is at a very early stage and officers are currently exploring opportunities and potential benefits to a combined approach. We think it is, on balance worth at least doing the Expression of Interest and the overall bid might be around 4m euro split three ways.