

Report to Planning Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 16 April 2014

Subject: Local Plan Update

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Committee Secretary: M Jenkins (01992 56 4607)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Panel note:

- (1) The progress made on the Local Plan; and
- (2) Update on the Duty to Co-operate and Neighbourhood Plans

Report:

Project Management/Local Plan timetable

1. The Local Development Scheme agreed in July 2014 proposes that the next stage of consultation on the draft plan/preferred option is to run between May and July 2015. However, for the reasons outlined in my report and explained at the previous meeting, it has not been possible to meet this timetable.
2. A detailed programme taking account of resources, setting out the key milestones and a best estimate on timings is being prepared and it is anticipated that this revised timetable will be drafted for consideration by Cabinet at their meeting on 11th June.

Update on Key Evidence

1. **Options for Growth:** A series of three member workshops, organised on an Area Planning Committee basis, were held in September/early October 2014 to engage members in the process of identifying options to be tested. A summary note has been sent to all members on the outcomes of the workshops by the Portfolio Holder.
2. **Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA):** Receipt of the final report from our consultants undertaking work to update the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) in conjunction with the other authorities within our Housing Market Area: East Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford has been slightly delayed. The reason for this is that new household projections have been published by Communities and Local Government, which are one of the key components of the assessment within the SHMA. Therefore, the consultants need to update the SHMA calculations using these (the Government's online Planning Policy Guidance stipulates this). Furthermore, updated economic forecasting data has been published which need to be taken into account, as national policy and guidance requires that assessments of need for housing and jobs are co-ordinated. We now expect to receive a draft final report towards the end of April; officers therefore hope to be able to brief the Member Co-operation for Sustainable Development Group on 30th April 2015 on the outputs. We obtained agreement from the other three authorities to commission this work last December and this is now being used as the basis for identifying the Objectively Assessed Housing Need. The consultants will be including consideration of housing mix and affordable housing in the final report.

3. **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA):** Work updating the Stage1 SFRA is nearly complete and a Members' workshop will be arranged with the consultants this Spring, the exact date for which will be advised shortly. Once completed, this work will inform the first phase of the Green Belt Review.
4. **Transport matters:** EFDC continues to work with neighbouring authorities, Essex County Council, Herts County Council and the Highways Agency on strategic transport modelling to gauge the current position in respect of the transport network in and around Harlow. Initial findings of the new model are likely to be available in the Spring. To support the emerging Local Plan, Essex County Council is currently preparing a transport accessibility study. This will provide a further tool to assess possible site allocations. Initial outcomes of this work are also expected in the Spring.
5. **Plan viability:** The plan viability being undertaken by Dixon Searle Partnership will also inform policy choices on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) / S106. Officers met with the consultants in February and it was agreed that the timetable be revised to enable the general direction from the Members' workshops on options and outcomes from SFRA Level 1, Green Belt Review Phase 1 and transport accessibility to inform the consideration of viability. A draft of the consultants stage 1 report is now due and, once received and considered by officers, a member workshop (likely to be in May) will be arranged. This will report on the market position, consider possible options and include an initial informal view on the possibility of charging CIL should the Council wishes to pursue this option.
6. **Economic and employment evidence:** Hardisty Jones Associates have provided interim findings on economic and employment evidence to support both the Local Plan and Council's overall Economic Development Strategy. Officers are ensuring that this work links effectively with work commissioned by Essex County Council for an Essex Economic Growth Strategy. This work is also being used to inform the SHMA and again officers are ensuring that the assessments of future need for housing and jobs are co-ordinated. Several local plans have failed at Examination in Public recently for not doing this.
7. **Green Belt Review:** Phase 1 of the Green Belt Review undertakes 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. It identifies both the primary functions of the Green Belt, which deliver the national purposes, and whether there are areas of the Green Belt land which no longer contribute towards the national purposes or contribute the least to these. The officer working group met on 12 March to discuss initial findings and to feed into the report. On the same day a meeting was also arranged to which all our neighbouring authorities were invited to advise them of our work and gain a clear understanding of any Green Belt Reviews they are undertaking. Following these meetings the Stage 1 report is now being finalised prior to the findings being shared with the Town and Parish Councils at their next meeting which is scheduled for 15th June. The report will then go forward to the Cabinet meeting in July. As I previously reported, the outcomes of the updated SFRA1 and transport accessibility work will be used to sieve sites and to inform the more detailed assessment as set out the proposed methodology and work programme for Phase 2.

Other matters

8. **Duty to Cooperate:** Officers continue to meet regularly with the appropriate authorities to consider cross boundary issues including, as reported above, the update to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment identifying the objectively assessed housing need, the approach taken to Green Belt reviews and strategic transport matters..
9. **Neighbourhood Plans:** Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers produced a revised draft Plan that is shortly to be formally consulted on and will then go forward for

independent examination. North Weald Bassett Parish Council's application for their Parish to be designated a neighbourhood area remains under consideration. Consultation has just ended on an application from Loughton which the Council will consider shortly. New regulations that came into force on 9 February 2015 mean that future designations will need to be made within 8 weeks. The Council will be writing shortly to all Town and Parish Councils outlining the level of support, guidance and funding available to those progressing neighbourhood plans.