

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 29 September 2015

**Subject:** Planning Policy

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor R Bassett

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**Recommending:**

**That the report of the Planning Policy Portfolio Holder be noted**

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## **1) Update on key evidence work**

### **Strategic Housing Market Assessment:**

The work has now been completed on this key piece of technical evidence producing an update Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) in conjunction with the other authorities within our Housing Market Area: East Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford. Experience at recent examinations including Uttlesford, and preliminary Inspectors' conclusions on Cambridge City and South Cambs Local Plans, vindicates the need to ensure the SHMA is completed in accordance with the Government's guidance and is based on the latest available information. It follows, therefore, that unless this work is done properly there is a strong likelihood that our Plan would be found unsound at examination. Finalising the SHMA was delayed by the need to take account of the latest CLG household projections released earlier this year and for additional work required to test the links between employment / job and housing target assumptions across the whole SHMA area.

The completed SHMA is to be formally considered by the SHMA partners at the Cooperation for Sustainable Development Board meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. I have arranged a briefing for members on the SHMA and the Economic report (see below) on the 21<sup>st</sup> September in the council offices. The expectation is that the SHMA will then form part of the Local Plan evidence base for each of the respective Councils. Reports on both the SHMA, and the related economic and employment evidence are on the 8<sup>th</sup> October Cabinet agenda.

What the SHMA report will give us is figures for Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAHN) for Epping Forest District and the other three Districts named above. However, it is important to understand that the OAHN is not the housing target for the District. It does, however, represent an important milestone towards establishing our housing target. Having identified the District wide need the next steps require us to take account of any policy constraints, including the Green Belt, which indicate that development should be restricted. If the evidence indicates that our need cannot be met in Epping Forest District then subsequent meetings of the Member Board, (which EFDC now chair), will need to discuss how the objectively assessed need might be met across the wider SHMA area.

### **Economic and employment evidence:**

The Council's existing Employment Land Review was completed in 2010 and requires revision. Two reports have been prepared, by the same consultants, to provide up to date robust economic needs evidence for the Local Plan. These are:

1. The 'Economic Evidence report for West Essex and East Herts' commissioned jointly by EFDC and East Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford Councils. Given the strong emphasis by Local Plan Inspectors that jobs and housing requirements should be aligned, this study was commissioned on the same basis as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and covering

the same authorities so as to inform all four Local Plans across the 'Functional Economic Market Area.

2. The 'Economic and Employment Evidence to Support the Local Plan and Economic Development Strategy' commissioned by and for EFDC alone. This gives a detailed analysis of the assessed economic need, in terms of employment floorspace and type to be provided through the EFDC Local Plan. It is needed because the Joint Economic Report is at a high level, expressing the Objectively Assessed Economic Need as a range of jobs growth per year, whereas the Council also needs to know the floorspace breakdown of what this need might be in order to inform the new Local Plan.

Now finalised, like the SHMA, these reports will also be reported initially to the Cooperation for Sustainable Development Board meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> September and then Cabinet on 8<sup>th</sup> October.

### **Green Belt Review & Settlement Hierarchy:**

The first stage of the Green Belt Review in the District has now been completed together with the production of a settlement hierarchy. These two reports were finalised following consideration of comments received over the summer from District, Town and Parish members.

Phase 1 undertakes a comprehensive high-level review of all Green Belt land across the District to assess 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 in particular the contribution that each of the areas of the Green Belt land individually make towards the national Green Belt purposes.

The findings were reported to Cabinet at the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> September and the Green Belt Review work will now be taken forward to enable a more detailed assessment of a number of broad locations identified in the Stage 1 work. This further work is to be undertaken by externally appointed consultants and should be completed early next year. It will confirm at a more detailed level:

- The areas where the Green Belt policy designation should remain;
- Any historic anomalies in the existing boundaries or locations where development has taken place, which may therefore suggest minor amendments to the Green Belt boundaries are required; and
- Areas that may be least harmful in Green Belt terms for potential development purposes.

The appointed consultants will be required to make provision for holding workshops to enable officers, district council members and parish/town council representatives to feed into the work.

### **2) Duty to cooperate:**

Officers (and Members) continue to meet regularly with the appropriate authorities to consider a wide range of cross boundary issues including the update to the SHMA and identifying the objectively assessed housing need, economic, employment and strategic transport matters as well as the approach taken to Green Belt reviews being carried out by authorities.

### **3) Neighbourhood Plans:**

Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers recently submitted their draft Plan. Following a period of consultation, the Plan will be considered by an independent examiner who will produce a report recommending whether the plan should go forward to the referendum stage.

There are seven other Parish and Town Councils that have applied to designate neighbourhood planning areas for their entire areas, five of which have been approved (Chigwell, Epping, Buckhurst Hill, Theydon Bois and Loughton). The application from the sixth, North Weald Bassett Parish, was

also approved subject to the exclusion of an area adjacent to Harlow's administrative boundary because a number of strategic cross boundary matters were identified that are not within the remit of a Neighbourhood Plan to address. In addition an application from Epping Upland Parish Council has also recently been received and is currently being considered.

#### **4) Government Policy Changes:**

Government issued a new version of Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) on 31<sup>st</sup> August. The measure is intended as part of a wider crackdown on unauthorised occupation of sites, to ensure all communities are required to abide by the same planning rules. The main changes are:

- Increased protection for the Green Belt; sites protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives and / or sites designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or within a National Park (or the Broads).
- In exceptional cases, where a local planning authority is burdened by a large-scale unauthorised site that has significantly increased their need, and their area is subject to strict and special planning constraints, then there is no assumption that the local planning authority is required to plan to meet their traveller site needs in full.
- A change in the definition of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople to exclude those who have permanently ceased to travel.

The main change that is likely to impact on the assessment of need is the change in definition. This means that persons who have *permanently* ceased to live a nomadic habit of life may no longer be covered by the PPTS. The new PPTS goes on to state that in determining whether persons are "Gypsies and Travellers" for the purposes of this planning policy, consideration should be given to the following issues amongst other relevant matters:

- a) Whether they previously led a nomadic habit of life
- b) The reasons for ceasing their nomadic habit of life
- c) Whether there is an intention of living a nomadic habit of life in the future, and if so, how soon and in what circumstances.

Consideration is currently being given as to whether the Accommodation Needs Assessment previously produced by consultants on behalf of Essex authorities will need to be updated to take account of the policy changes; and if so the extent to which the assessment will need to be revised.

#### **5) Food Task Force**

The Task Force, with support of partners within and outside the district, continues to develop its work programme.

Progress on the new qualification for horticulture lead by Epping Forest College with financial support from Essex County Council, is being made. Modules are being developed in conjunction with a major local business, to ensure training matches industry needs. LANTRA are acting as consultants to enable full accreditation. Candidates are being identified to undertake the programme when complete.

A workshop will be held in October targeted at planning officers from neighbouring authorities with planning powers or roles, to examine a planning policy paper produced by the taskforce, which looks at the industry, opportunities and barriers to growth. This will be led by the Chairman of Vibrant Partnerships, formerly part of the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority.

The task force has been anxious to examine the research and development deficit around industry technology. It has been agreed to commission a report into the feasibility of establishing an institute for Food Security. A brief for consultants has been produced. Funding has been sought from

partners to enable the study to progress. Partners are expected to confirm funding by the end of September. Allied to this the Taskforce has entered into partnership with NIAB, based in Cambridge as the UK arm of an EU Interreg Bid called Bioboost, to look at reducing carbon footprint and expanding recycling in the sector.

The last meeting was attended by a team from the University of Essex leading research in botanic and glass and lighting technology. They will be looking to engage growers directly with latest scientific developments and establishing a science presence in local facilities.

An agritech report looking at Food capacity along the LSCC corridor has been commissioned by the Taskforce on behalf of the LSCC is now complete. A major Food Symposium is to be held in the autumn, involving commercial growers, academic and research companies, including interests from the pharmaceutical sector to review this report and develop a joint approach to sector expansion. Sponsorship for this event has already been secured.

The task force has been approached to find a partner to lead development on a bid to the EU URBACT programme. This programme enables information sharing/learning across EU states. The Task force is currently reviewing participation and examining costs/benefits.

In July the task force hosted a tour of the industry locally with the Chief Executive of SELEP and officers from the Rural payments Agency at DEFRA. The Task force has been asked to bring forward proposals with its sister organisation Produced in Kent, for taking the industry forward and developing a wider /integrated approach to horticulture. This work will be informed by the governments recently launched plan for boosting productivity in rural communities.