

## **Report to the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Report reference:** CHB-004-2017/18

**Date of meeting:** 29 January 2018

**Portfolio:** Housing – Cllr S. Stavrou

**Subject:** New Development Sites

**Responsible Officer:** Paul Pledger – Asst. Director (Housing Property & Development) (01992 564248)

**Democratic Services:** Jackie Leither

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### **Recommendations:**

- (1) That a recommendation be made to the Cabinet to delegate authority to the Director of Communities to identify new Council House-building development sites and to undertake feasibility studies and viability studies, which will then be presented to the Cabinet Committee for consideration; and**
- (2) That a recommendation be made to the Cabinet to amend the Cabinet Committee Terms of Reference to allow the Cabinet Committee to agree any new development sites that may be added to the House-building programme.**

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

Currently, the Cabinet Committee is only authorised, in its Terms of Reference, to approve any feasibility studies for sites that appeared on the original list of 65 sites approved by the Cabinet in 2012, each of which has now been considered and has either obtained Planning Permission or an alternative option agreed.

In order to avoid adding work to the Cabinet process, this report seeks to delegate authority to the Director of Communities to identify sites, undertake a feasibility study and viability study before presenting the outcome to the Cabinet Committee, whose Terms of Reference would need to be amended to reflect this process.

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

1. To take each new site to the Cabinet for approval in the first instance as is the current procedure. However, this creates unnecessary anxiety for local residents where sites may not even be viable in the first place. This also is work that could be delegated to the Cabinet Committee to free up valuable time for the Cabinet.

### **Background**

1. In July 2012 the Cabinet approved a list of potential development sites, made up of a primary and reserve list, which would make up the Council House-building Programme. At that time, it was agreed that any further development assessments would be undertaken over time by officers of:

- (a) All other garage sites comprising 6 or less garages;
  - (b) Any further garage sites that start to have vacancies with no waiting list; and
  - (c) Any Council-owned land on housing sites considered to be surplus to requirements.
2. At that time it was also agreed that further reports would be submitted to the Cabinet in order to consider whether or not these sites should be added to either the Primary List or Reserve List.
3. In practice, this process could be amended to free up valuable Time for the Cabinet by delegating authority to the Director of Communities to undertake feasibility studies and Viability studies on any new site that may be identified and to present them direct to the Cabinet Committee. These would be presented in the same way as other sites have in the past been presented, whereby local Ward Members are invited to participate in the discussion.
4. Should the Cabinet Committee then agree to proceed with the development site based on the feasibility study as presented, then it would be necessary to seek an amendment to the Cabinet Committee Terms of Reference, where it is currently only able to consider and sign-off development appraisals and financial appraisals for sites previously identified by the Cabinet as having development potential and that could be included within the Council's Housebuilding Programme.
5. It is therefore recommended that a recommendation be made to the Cabinet, through the minutes of this meeting, that:
  - a. the Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Communities to identify new Council House-building development sites and to undertake feasibility studies and viability studies; and
  - b. the Cabinet Committee Terms of Reference be amended to allow the Cabinet Committee to agree any new development sites that may be added to the House-building programme.

### **Resource Implications**

Any feasibility costs will be met from the existing Capital Programme for Council House-building in the same way it currently is.

### **Legal and Governance Implications**

Housing Act 1985.

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

Since many of the garage sites that will developed are unsightly and attract vandalism and anti-social behaviour, their development for affordable housing should make them safer, cleaner and greener.

### **Consultation Undertaken**

None relevant at this stage. However, Ward Councillors will be consulted on the feasibility studies and Local residents will be consulted on any development proposals by

the Planning and Economic Development Directorate when planning applications are submitted for any proposed developments.

### **Background Papers:**

- Previous report to the Cabinet on development sites in July 2012
- The Cabinet Committee Terms of Reference

### **Risk Management**

There is a comprehensive risk register that has been compiled and is being monitored in respect of the house-building programme. Each risk, where appropriate has a risk mitigation action plan.

With regard to the issues under consideration for this report, the main risk is that the most appropriate Council-owned sites for development are not put forward to the next stage – i.e. to have development and financial appraisals undertaken. This could result in less appropriate sites being developed, less properties being able to be developed through the Council's Housebuilding Programme overall and/or the overall cost of the Housebuilding Programme being higher than necessary.

### **Equality Analysis**

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. This means that the equality information provided to accompany this report is essential reading for all members involved in the consideration of this report. The equality information is provided as an Appendix to the report and is attached at CHB-001-2017/18.