

# **Report to the North Weald Airfield Strategy Cabinet Committee**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Date of meeting: 31 July 2007.**

**Subject: North Weald Airfield Planning Context – East of England Plan.**

**Officer contact for further information: Derek Macnab (01992 – 564260).**

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

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That, in relation to the East of England Plan, the planning context for North Weald Airfield be noted.**

## **Overview:**

1. On 19 February 2007, the Cabinet considered the report of the Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, with respect to the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the East of England Plan.
2. The final formal consultation stage for the East of England Plan for 2001 – 2021 (due for adoption in late 2007) had been reached, with a closing date for responses to the consultation by 9 March 2007. The Panel conducting the Examination in public had received the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes and Statement of Reasons in December 2006. It was noted that the majority of the Panel's recommendations had been accepted.
3. In addition, the Secretary of State had proposed a number of changes, which included: a stronger emphasis on Harlow as a major growth location; a review of Green Belt boundaries between 2021 and 2031 as a result of the anticipated growth of Harlow; housing targets for individual authorities to be regarded as minimums, to be exceeded where possible; and a greater focus on reducing carbon dioxide emissions and increasing sources of renewable energy.
4. Following consideration of the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the East of England Plan, the Council's intended response was based upon a number of factors.
5. The omission of North Weald as a major development location was welcomed, along with an acknowledgement that there were development constraints south of the Stort Valley. The Council supported the recognition that Green Belt policy in the District would preclude a long-term supply of new housing, and the increased local discretion granted to policies such as housing densities, affordable housing and parking standards. The reduction of carbon emissions and promotion of renewable energy sources for new developments was welcomed, but there was an issue over vehicle emissions and the performance of existing developments. The Council supported the reinstatement of a major urban extension to the north of Harlow, but felt that a revised Sustainable Appraisal should be undertaken, so that the localised impacts of the proposed changes could be fully considered.
6. In its final response the Council repeated arguments opposing urban extensions to the south and west of Harlow, as well as any excessive growth to the east of Harlow, on the grounds of insufficient infrastructure to support such developments. It was felt that there were better alternative sites along the West Anglia main railway line. Concern was also expressed that the proposed scale of development had not been matched by guaranteed funding for the necessary accompanying infrastructure improvements, which in turn raised doubts about the achievability of the proposed development in the area.

7. Serious reservations were also repeated concerning the proposed job and dwelling provision in the District, with the exception of the extensions to Harlow. The Council made clear its continued willingness to work with other stakeholders to prepare options appraisals and Local Development Documents once the East of England Plan had been finalised.

**Implications for North Weald Airfield:**

8. Therefore, whilst there were clearly a number of key considerations contained within the East of England Plan report, of direct relevance to the North Weald Airfield Cabinet Committee's consideration of the proposed Licence and Lease Agreements on this Agenda, was the continued omission of North Weald as a location for major development.

9. Since the East of England Plan 2001 – 2021, has been under consideration, the Council has had to pursue a prudent approach with respect to the length of Leases/Licences awarded to tenants at North Weald Airfield. A general policy has therefore been applied, offering tenants certainty until 31 December 2007 with annual break-clauses thereafter, which could be exercised by either party, up until 2010.

10. This arrangement was intended to allow operators a degree of certainty, whilst still enabling the Council to refrain flexibility to respond to development pressures. With the potential for Regional Planning Guidance, compelling the Council to develop alternative uses for the Airfield now largely removed, there is scope for a longer-term view to be taken with respect to Lease/Licence Agreements for the site. This will enable the Council to pursue its objective of maximising leisure use of North Weald Airfield, whilst managing the site as efficiently as possible and maximising income.