

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NOTES OF A MEETING OF STRONGER PLACE SELECT COMMITTEE  
HELD ON THURSDAY, 4 JULY 2019  
IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES  
AT 7.00 - 8.40 PM**

**Members Present:** D Sunger (Chairman), S Heather (Vice-Chairman), L Burrows, J Jennings, S Jones, H Kauffman, J Mclvor, R Morgan, S Neville, D Stocker and J H Whitehouse

**Other members present:** N Bedford, P Bolton, R Brookes, A Lion, G Mohindra, A Patel, J Philip and H Whitbread

**Apologies for Absence:** I Hadley and C McCredie

**Officers Present** S Jevans (Interim Strategic Director), J Houston (Strategic Partnership Specialist and Economic Lead), J Nolan (Service Director (Commercial & Regulatory Services)), P Pledger (Service Director (Housing & Property Services)), T Tsui (Projects Officer (Planning Policy)), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer) and S Kits (Social Media and Customer Services Officer)

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**1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION**

The Chairman made a short address to remind all present that the meeting would be broadcast on the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

**2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)**

The following substitutions were reported:

That Councillor D Stocker was substituting for Councillor I Hadley; and

That Councillor J H Whitehouse was substituting for Councillor C McCredie.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

**4. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND WORK PROGRAMME**

S Jevans, Interim Strategic Director, was in attendance.

The Chairman, Councillor D Sunger, welcomed members and explained that tonight's meeting was an opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of the role and work areas under the remit of this new Select Committee.

(a) The Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference set out the core areas of responsibility namely the delivery of the Local Plan, North Weald (including masterplanning), the St John's Road

development, Council Housebuilding and economic growth, skills and employment. It would also have an overview of the Waste and Leisure Management contracts, as well as the green agenda to help inform policy and to future proof the place. The actual role of the new Select Committee was set out in eight core areas but importantly, was to engage in policy review and to develop an effective work programme of the pre-scrutiny of these core areas of responsibility.

The Select Committee noted the Terms of Reference.

(b) Work Programme

The 2019/20 work programme would be updated for each meeting to reflect ongoing progress. Both the North Weald Airfield Masterplan and the St John's Road development would be going to the next scheduled meeting on 17 September 2019.

Members were asked for suggestions for the green agenda (item 5) for officers to consider before the next meeting.

Councillor S Neville asked about progress the Council was making in withdrawing single-use bottles. Their continued usage was evident in the Chamber tonight and he looked forward to progress being made on their replacement by carafes and cafetières, as had happened in the Committee rooms. S Jevans would follow this up.

The Select Committee noted the current work programme.

**5. NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD MASTERPLAN - PRESENTATION**

J Nolan, Service Director (Commercial and Regulatory), was in attendance.

North Weald Airfield (NWA) was located on a 150-hectare site and was the Council's largest land asset. It was used for general aviation and commercial purposes as well as outdoor events and leisure uses. The west side was mainly confined to aviation uses, while the east side was for non-aviation uses. NWA had been established in 1916 and had served as a frontline fighter station in World Wars 1 and 2. The RAF squadrons from the Norwegian Air Force had been based there during the second World War, and a strong officer and veteran link still remained. The Council had purchased NWA in 1979 from the Ministry of Defence.

The Council was now seeking to commission consultants to produce a masterplan to guide development to meet the requirements of the Submission Version of the Local Plan for NWA; otherwise known as Local Plan site, NWBE4. The consultants would be required to produce a masterplan to include 10 hectares of employment land, the expansion of aviation activities and space for leisure / community usage. In addition to designing an indicative layout, the consultants would also need to prepare all supporting documentation. Key non-aviation activities would have to be relocated to the eastern side. A strategic expansion of the west side for aviation uses with a new control tower, would also include the construction of a new access road to the airfield from the B181 road. It was envisaged that the current Grade II Listed control tower would be reutilised, and the east-west runway developed as a taxiway for warehouses located either side. On the adoption of the Submission Version of the Local Plan, the boundary of the Green Belt Land (GBL) would be revised to lie outside NWA. However, the impact of future development on neighbouring GBL would need to be carefully considered. North Weald Bassett had a separate masterplan, but the two masterplans would complement each other. Therefore, expressions of interest were being sought.

Councillor H Kauffman was proud of the Council's involvement in NWA. He agreed with the separation of aviation from non-aviation activities and would welcome the compatibility of uses with the airfield site. The longevity of uses that might come along over the next twenty years from the airline and delivery industries could therefore, assist in the significant future proofing and ethos of what NWA was about. J Nolan replied that members had always wanted to maintain historic links and there were heritage aircraft housed on the site, thus concentrating aviation usage on the west side would achieve this with an aviation hub.

Councillor J McIvor commented that the reorganisation of the airfield was welcomed. However, taking account of the anxiety of residents that it did remain an aviation area, he asked if there had been an analysis of what the level of aviation growth could be and its impact on noise. J Nolan replied that NWA was a very popular place. The National Police Air Service had recently relocated its base there and there was a current planning application from Herts and Essex Air Ambulance to extend its facility on the site. There had also been expressions of interest from a heritage aircraft museum and a flight training school. Once the Submission Version of the Local Plan was adopted then the masterplan could get underway.

## **6. ST JOHNS ROAD DEVELOPMENT - PRESENTATION**

J Nolan, Service Director (Commercial and Regulatory), was in attendance.

When Epping Primary School had opened in 2008, the junior school had become surplus to requirements. The site included the school owned by Essex County Council (ECC), Epping Town Council offices in Epping Hall and the Council's repair depot. The three authorities had contracted town planning consultants to develop a brief for the site. Following a public consultation, over 400 responses were received that supported an improved community and leisure centre, a cinema, the retention of historic building features, a public realm and the protection of existing trees. In early 2017 a Tripartite Agreement with Epping Town Council and a developer, Frontier Estates, was in place to move this project forward. However, with still no conclusion between the parties, the agreement ended in October 2018 and ECC's land interest was purchased by the Council.

The Cabinet had agreed that the St John's Road development should proceed using the previously agreed development brief, and was also to include a new leisure centre (Sports England's preferred choice as Epping Sports Centre was to close), retail space and 32 housing units. There was also the proposal to relocate Epping Town Council to 323 High Street, and monthly meetings were being held to progress this. The provision of a cinema was welcomed by young people and discussions with cinema operators were ongoing. The buildings earmarked for this would be suitable for conversion, thus historic features could be retained.

White, Young and Green had been appointed to provide project management support and tasked to present three development options to Cabinet on 5 December 2019. The consultants had been briefed on the Submission Version of the Local Plan and site surveys had been undertaken. The project had been included in the capital programme and indicative costs should be known by November 2019. A pre-application advice request was expected in October 2019 with the preparation of a pre-application advice outcome in mid-November 2019. A short video of the proposed site development was screened to members.

Members and Portfolio Holders were very supportive of this project, which would have a positive impact on Epping and be beneficial for the District's residents.

It would also be a great opportunity for young people for both employment and leisure opportunities. However, the following points were also raised:

#### Parking

Councillors J H Whitehouse and H Whitbread, Portfolio Holder (Housing and Property Services), shared concerns about parking for the planned leisure centre, cinema, retail outlets and homes that were being planned in this development. J Nolan replied that parking on site would be limited as under the Local Plan Submission Version there would be parking constraints as it was within three kilometres of Epping Forest and owing to the Habitats Regulations. There were two car parks nearby where parking spaces would be freed up by late afternoon and at the weekend. Councillor J H Whitehouse continued that it was unrealistic not to provide adequate parking and would be storing up future problems.

Councillor N Bedford, Portfolio Holder (Community and Partnership Services) asked about access points for the site. He also remarked that with the loss of parking in Epping over the last few years, could consideration be given for the leisure centre to have a flat roof, which might accommodate 30 to 40 parking spaces. J Nolan fully understood members' parking concerns, that a balance was needed and that the consultants would come back to the Council on this issue. There would be four access points, which would include a service access at the north end and a new access at the southern end from the High Street.

#### Governance and project management

Councillor A Lion, Portfolio Holder (Strategic Projects), asked about the governance structure and how the project would be managed, as the project needed to be tracked and delivered on time and within budget. J Nolan replied that officers and consultants would be holding regular meetings to December 2019. Officers would keep members informed through reports to the Asset Management and Economic Development Cabinet Committee, with decisions going to Cabinet for ratification. The Pentana project management software would track progress, which would be monitored by Internal Audit.

Councillor R Brookes asked if Places Leisure would be managing the leisure contract, to which J Nolan replied, yes, under exactly the same arrangement as for Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre.

Councillor A Patel, Portfolio Holder (Commercial and Regulatory Services), supported efficiencies and maximising initiatives around the green agenda and that policies should be aligned to the Local Plan.

Councillor N Bedford wanted to ensure that the project would be digitally enabled and that the site would have free Wi-Fi and use of 5G network.

#### Essex County Council Registrar and Epping Town Council

Councillor G Mohindra (District Councillor and ECC Cabinet member (Finance, Property and Housing) asked if the library and County Registrar of Births, Ceremonies and Deaths that was located opposite the site in St John's Road would be part of phase 2. J Nolan replied that ECC did want to vacate this site, so the library and Registrar might be incorporated in the future.

Councillor L Burrows asked how important was Epping Town Council's involvement. J Nolan replied that it was vital, as the Town Council fulfilled a community leadership role with the Council. It occupied a portion of the site and the Council needed its agreement that it would be happy to move to a new site.

## 7. DRAFT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY - PRESENTATION

J Houston, Specialist Manager (Strategic Partnerships), was in attendance.

Nurturing Growth, a discussion paper to launch work on a new strategy to support economic development in the District from 2019 to 2025, had been published in the agenda. It put forward proposals to deliver a long term vision and plan to future proof the District's economic success, enable entrepreneurs to become established, businesses to grow and residents to prosper. A public consultation was underway and members' thoughts and feedback were welcomed.

Why did we need a strategy? The economy was developing and evolving but the District did not have exhaustive resources and needed to focus the District's economic development into those areas that would give the greatest benefit, hence Nurturing Growth. It was increasingly important to attract inward investment whether that was from Central Government, local enterprise agencies or the private sector, and when bids were made that they fitted in with the District's priorities to develop a greater value. The Council played a role to work in collaboration with interested parties, to bring investors and partners together, and that public money was used properly. Therefore, it was not just a plan for the Council, but also a plan for the place - Epping Forest District.

Nurturing Growth laid out the key aspects of the District economy, which were:

- High streets and town centres
- Tourism and visitor economy
- Infrastructure and transport
- Partnerships that deliver
- Skills and employment
- Growing our food sector
- A place for entrepreneurs and business start-ups

It prompted discussion by asking for suggestions on whether this was a priority, were these the right things to do, were there any other suggestions and was anything missing. The initial consultation had been circulated to 150 interested parties, published on the Council's website and promoted through social media.

The feedback was varied and some people had thought the Council might be being overly ambitious and would it be able to deliver. Key feedback included comments on workforce retention in the private and public sector and was there the capacity to fill jobs on offer. Other comments were in favour of a specific rural strategy with its own set of priorities, and a specific strategy on connectivity in respect of joint working in some sectors. The Council was looking to re-institute the consultation period and would be organising a specific stakeholder conference in the autumn to assess the extent of our ambition, the main strategies and would look at the key actions.

Councillor S Neville supported protecting the green heritage while pursuing growth but there was nothing to tackle climate change or how to achieve a zero or low carbon economy in this area, as it had not been factored in? J Houston replied that

perhaps this needed to be strengthened. He acknowledged the Local Plan had addressed climate change but would not be revisiting Local Plan issues, but rather complement it. Early feedback from members had been on mitigation, an integrated strategy for alternative forms of transport. Pressure on an integrated travel plan was required. Work on the green infrastructure also fitted in and that the revised document would make this clearer.

Councillor J H Whitehouse asked who the 150 recipients had been and how did Mr Houston want to deal with the consultation questions as she had many detailed points to raise. J Houston replied that Nurturing Growth was sent to the economic partners held on its database, all parish councils, the Corporation of London, Epping Forest College, (now New City College), Princess Alexandra Hospital, the Clinical Commissioning Group, our website and social media. A special presentation was also made to members of the Epping Forest Chamber of Commerce. The consultation period was extended as people had wanted more time to respond. He agreed to meet Councillor Whitehouse after the meeting to answer her questions directly.

Councillor H Kauffman asked about building resilience, as the District was losing people to London. There were not enough centres of excellence, industrial space or incubator sites and also no integrated transportation. He suggested that through investment and nurturing growth with technological partnerships, the Royal Gunpowder Mills site in Waltham Abbey offered a unique opportunity. Apprenticeships were needed and through the building of tech space there, this could be achieved and offered to help.

Councillor J McIvor asked if specific consultations targeting rural area attractions that were difficult to travel to would be undertaken to help develop tourism further. J Houston agreed he wanted to pick this up as a key issue was getting around in an environmentally friendly and healthy way. This included cycle ways, linking up to routes in and out of London and around neighbouring areas in East Hertfordshire. Tourism was in excess of £220 million a year in Epping Forest District. For East Herts, Broxbourne and Harlow, the tourism income was around £750 million, therefore, a substantial income, which potentially offered more employment opportunity than Stansted Airport.

Councillor G Mohindra welcomed this strategy, which was filling a vacuum that other public bodies had not yet done, because a lot of funding for local government would be coming from business rates. This Council might not be able to afford the services it currently enjoyed so therefore, it was a really important aspect that would help keep the Council well run.

Councillor A Patel commented that in other strategies that had been presented to the Council reference had been made back to its Corporate Plan and how strategies linked into the corporate objectives. He said it would be useful if these were explained in the introduction to relate to the overall strategy of the Council. J Houston agreed this would be done and to triangulate what we had in this plan. This would also help the Council to achieve better funding from Central Government than it had done in the past.

Councillor A Lion, Portfolio Holder (Strategic Projects), acknowledged that the key priorities identified had been put together. One of these was digital, implicitly the green agenda, to address working from home and for instance, to provide local services, e.g. closer to GPs. Princess Alexandra Hospital was 25 per cent down on nursing staff, as they could earn a lot more in London. How did you maintain and

retain a skilled workforce as this would also be needed in Epping Forest? High streets were changing. How did you maintain the vibrancy of high streets with more people buying online? A key aspect on the green agenda was air quality monitoring. How could you link up street electronics to CCTV for traffic monitoring and car park control to minimise pollution? These issues were fundamental and were implicit to the ongoing work on economic development strategy.

## 8. LOCAL PLAN DELIVERY - PRESENTATION

T Tsui, Planning Policy Projects Officer, was in attendance.

An update on the Local Plan was received. The Council had been required to produce a new Local Plan that would set out its planning strategies for where new developments would be built until 2033 and also set out its planning policies, which would be used to determine planning applications. Large numbers of technical documents had been published and the public consulted over the last eight years. The Submission Version of the Local Plan has been published in December 2017. Ms Louise Phillips was appointed as the Inspector to carry out the independent examination of the Local Plan at the public hearing sessions that had been held from February to June 2019. The Council was awaiting the Inspector's interim advice, which was due on 12 July 2019.

Meanwhile the Implementation Team was working on progressing the masterplan sites, which included North Weald Airfield, North Weald Bassett, Waltham Abbey, Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (3 sites – East of Harlow site, Latton Priory and the Water Lane area). A number of other applications for Local Plan sites had been granted and others were being submitted seeking planning permission. The Council was still being affected by the concerns of Natural England and the Conservators of Epping Forest about the potential impact of developments on the Forest (Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation), particularly local air quality. Therefore, no planning decision notices were being finalised for developments in the SAC, although the Council was working to resolve this with the stakeholders. The Council's Planning Policy Team would be reporting back any advice received from the Inspector to members. Once a final report was received from the Inspector, the decision would be taken for the Local Plan to be presented to Full Council to be formally adopted, hopefully by early next year.

Councillor S Neville said that if the interim report was expected on 12 July, would the Inspector be issuing any further changes or would this only be known when the Inspector issued her final report on whether the Council had implemented the changes that she wanted? T Tsui replied that the Council had agreed a number of changes throughout the public hearing sessions but it was difficult to surmise what interim advice the Inspector would be providing.

To help clarify the issue around not being able to issue planning decisions, Councillor J Philip, Portfolio Holder (Planning Services), explained that Natural England's instruction to the Council that it could not issue planning decisions was quite clear, but neither could the Secretary of State determine planning applications. Moving forward, the Council would hopefully receive a clear steer from the Inspector on the additional pieces of work required of the Council and on the major modifications to ensure the soundness of the Local Plan. By early autumn, the Council was hoping to be able to consult with the public on the modifications. The Inspector would take on board the responses from the consultation on the modifications and what she had heard during the hearing sessions. There would then hopefully be a final report from the Inspector to further ensure that the plan was sound, and to allow the Local Plan

to be brought to Council for adoption. In the interim period, updates on the progress of the Local Plan progress and masterplans, performance agreements and any Section 106 receipts would be reported to Cabinet or the Local Plan Cabinet Committee.

## **9. DRAFT STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

The revised draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) reflected recent changes to planning regulations. This also included a requirement to review the SCI every five years. The SCI detailed how the Council intended to involve communities and interested parties in the preparation and review of local planning policies. It also set out how they could engage to make their views known, as part of the planning process, and the feedback they should expect from the Council. Following approval by Cabinet on 13 June 2019, the SCI was published on the Council's website for a six-week consultation, which would close on 13 August 2019.

Councillor J Philip encouraged all members and communities to take part in this consultation. It laid out what the Council had been working on during the Local Plan and how the Council would be involving communities in the planning process, so he asked all members to please make your comments known.

The Select Committee noted the Draft Statement of Community Involvement.

## **10. COUNCIL HOUSEBUILDING PROGRAMME - PRESENTATION**

P Pledger, Service Director (Housing and Property), was in attendance.

In December 2011 the Cabinet had agreed a new Council Housebuilding Programme initially based on 20 homes per year for six years. These were to be allocated to housing applicants on the Council's housing waiting list at affordable rents. This target was increased to 300 houses over a ten-year timescale. Council housebuilding was restarted after a 35-year gap in 2012 as a result of HRA self-financing and the Government's improved discounts to tenants of properties under the Right to Buy scheme, the capital of which was ringfenced to be reinvested back into Council housebuilding, i.e. 1-4-1 receipts. However, there were a few conditions, which required 1-4-1 receipts to be reinvested within three years of receipt or they would have to be paid back to the Government with interest, and the 1-4-1 receipts could fund up to 30 per cent of the cost of a new home. The 70 per cent balance would need to be funded by the Council from its own resources through loan provision, Section 106 contributions, grants from the former Homes and Communities Agency (now MHCLG), sale of HRA land and other funding opportunities. Therefore, this had necessitated that the Council act quickly.

East Thames had been appointed the development agent on all aspects of the process from planning and building to handing over the homes. The Council had identified 69 under used garage sites on Council land which had a development potential for 227 new homes to be built. The Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee was formed in 2013 to undertake all executive decisions with the programme.

This resulted in a phased, three-year development programme for the 69 garage sites. Phase 1 covered four sites in Waltham Abbey that were developed into 23 new homes and was completed in the summer of 2017. However, the contractor (East Thames) had performed poorly and went into liquidation before completion, which led to delays and increased costs. Meanwhile, as Right to Buy sales had increased, this

meant that the housebuilding programme needed to correspondingly rise to keep pace with the 1-4-1 receipts. This led to phase 2 in Loughton (Burton Road) where 51 new homes were built and occupied and phase 3 for 34 new homes in Epping, North Weald and Coopersale. Other opportunities included the purchase of eight new affordable homes at a S106 development in Roydon. Six open street properties were also purchased to overcome a rise in Right to Buy sales. Fourteen more sites were still going through the planning application process, which would deliver 48 new homes.

Regarding progress on phases 4, 5 and 6, in 2017 East Thames and London and Quadrant merged, and the development agent exercised its right not to extend its contract agreement with the Council. A rethink of the development management programme led to the setting up of a Strategic Framework Alliance of specialist contractors and consultants. The developments in these phases were repackaged. The first package would be in Loughton with construction due to begin this autumn. The packages were broken down and let to meet the capital from the 1-4-1 receipts. If the Council had surplus 1-4-1 receipt monies, the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee had already agreed for the Council to purchase more open market street properties. Therefore, 122 new homes were or nearly were completed, 92 new homes were in the pipeline with planning permission, and 48 new homes where planning permission was being sought. This would deliver 214 new homes with planning permission, or a total of 262 new homes in the pipeline including those without planning permission.

Councillor S Neville welcomed the Council housebuilding programme, but asked if the number of Council houses being sold was greater than the number being built? Also, what was the Council's plan after the current phases had been completed regarding future Council housebuilding and their locations? P Pledger replied that the long term future was still being considered, but phases 4, 5 and 6 would take the Council into 2021/22. The number of Council houses being built in 2018 had been higher than those being sold, but this had not been the case so far in 2019.

Councillor J H Whitehouse was congratulatory of the housebuilding programme but said that there had been a lot of resident opposition to garages going in Epping and the loss of the use of some footpaths. However, the new properties were of a very high standard.

Councillor R Morgan said that parking was very important, and losing garages was not helpful especially in Matching Green. He hoped that adequate parking would be provided for residents of these new homes in this location. P Pledger said that this particular site was going through the planning application stage and he would be meeting the planners and look at the parking provision.

Councillor H Whitbread, Portfolio Holder (Housing and Property Services), thanked P Pledger for this comprehensive presentation, and that having toured the District, a lot of Council housing stock, such as the Burton Road development, was very modern and had incorporated eco-friendly measures, e.g. smart meters and solar panels. The Council should be proud that it was delivering high quality housing stock, especially as this was bucking the national trend of many other local authorities.

Councillor N Bedford applauded the Council's achievement, but what was the net gain of asset value of converting garages to houses? P Pledger said the he would have to get back on this and was to be reported at a later meeting.

Councillor A Patel asked about lifestyle homes and the specifications adopted that were being incorporated in the new properties. P Pledger replied that the Council had decided on its own standards, and this had included lifetime homes, secure by design, and space standards (generally) that it was able to adopt. The vast majority of new homes were lifetime homes, and were either accessible for wheelchair users or had the potential for wheelchair user access, such that the floor layouts would be able to accommodate, e.g. floor lifts, stair lifts or the installation of hoists. Therefore, this new housing stock would have the potential to be easily adaptable to meet a disabled resident's needs.

**11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was noted that future meetings of the Select Committee would be held at 7.00pm on:

- 17 September 2019;
- 9 December 2019; and
- 24 March 2020.