

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-014-2020/21

Date of Meeting: 20 July 2020



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio:	Planning and Sustainability – Cllr. N Bedford
Subject:	Implementation of the Local Plan: Update on progress
Responsible Officer:	Alison Blom-Cooper (01992 564066)
Democratic Services:	Adrian Hendry (01992 564246)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the progress of Masterplans and Concept Frameworks, including the use of Planning Performance Agreements and the progress of other proposals at pre-application and application stage be noted (see Appendices 1- 4).

Executive Summary

Following the October 2018 Cabinet meeting which agreed the governance arrangements for the implementation of the Local Plan, the Implementation Team made a commitment to provide members with regular updates on the progress of Masterplans and Concept Frameworks within Epping Forest District to ensure that members are kept fully up to date.

This report therefore provides members with an update on the progress of Strategic Masterplans, Concept Frameworks and Planning Performance Agreements within the District. Discussions with site promoters and developers have continued during the COVID-19 pandemic with meetings taking place virtually. Project programmes are being adjusted where necessary to account of the need for revised community engagement arrangements.

The Council is currently consulting on the Draft Green Infrastructure Strategy which focusses on the future use of existing, and the introduction of new open spaces in the District to form a network of multi-purpose spaces for both people and wildlife to thrive. It will also make provision for Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace to support the action identified in the Inspector's advice of 2 August 2019 to mitigate the impacts of increased recreational pressure on the Special Area of Conservation. The closing date for responses is 16 July 2020.

Following receipt of leading Counsel advice, the Council is continuing to work proactively to identify an interim strategy to address the backlog of planning applications held in abeyance following the advice from Natural England pending completion of the additional Habitats Regulations Assessment.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

- To ensure that members are kept fully up to date on the progress of Masterplans and Concept Frameworks and other major proposals being promoted within the District.

Other Options for Action:

Not to update members on the progress on the above issues would be contrary to the commitment made by the Implementation Team as noted in the 18 October 2018 Cabinet Report.

Report:

Strategic Masterplans, Concept Frameworks and other allocated sites

1. [The Local Plan Submission Version 2017](#) (LPSV) promotes a joined up, collaborative and proactive approach to the planning and implementation of key strategic sites across Epping Forest District. The production of Masterplans and Concept Frameworks will ensure that development proposals are brought forward in accordance with the Council's priorities and policies and facilitate the delivery of necessary infrastructure. Such an approach is an important step towards boosting the timely delivery of high quality development and infrastructure within the District.

2. Strategic Masterplans and Concept Frameworks provide an overarching framework to ensure that development is brought forward in a coordinated and coherent way in accordance with high quality place making principles. The planning applications which follow must demonstrate general conformity with an endorsed Masterplan or Concept Framework. As set out in the [18 October 2018 Cabinet Report](#), the Council's Local Plan Cabinet Committee (LPCC) has the authority to approve Draft Strategic Masterplans and Concept Frameworks for consultation. Following the six-week consultation period, Strategic Masterplans will then be taken to Cabinet for formal endorsement as a material planning consideration. The process for Concept Frameworks is broadly similar, however owing to their smaller scale, these will only be taken to LPCC once for formal endorsement.

3. As set out in paragraph 15 of the report to Cabinet on 18 October 2018 a commitment was made to provide members with regular updates on the progress of masterplans and concept frameworks within Epping Forest District to ensure that members are kept fully informed of the progression of each plan.

4. The LPSV has identified site allocations which should be subject to the Strategic Masterplanning approach (see LPSV para 2.90 and 2.91). These include the following masterplans:

- Latton Priory
- Water Lane
- East of Harlow
- North Weald Bassett
- North Weald Airfield
- South Epping
- Waltham Abbey North

And Concept Frameworks (see LPSV paras 2.99 and 2.100) for sites in:

- West Ongar
- South Nazeing.

Inspector's advice following examination hearings

5. Work continues to progress the Actions identified by the Inspector following the hearing sessions for the Independent Examination the Local Plan held between February and June 2019. The Inspector's Advice to the Council on 2 August 2019 ([ED98](#)) and her subsequent reply dated 25 November 2019 ([ED102](#)) sets out a number of changes to the Plan which are required to remedy issues of soundness in the form of Main Modifications.

6. The Actions identified within the advice are being progressed and the Council's latest response to the Inspector, dated 24 April 2020, sets out revisions to the high level programme as submitted in January 2020 ([ED106](#)). This recaps the way in which the Council is approaching matters relating to the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and updating and consolidating the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and viability documents supporting the Local Plan. Following discussions with the Council's consultants and dialogue with Natural England including the incorporation of their comments the Council has submitted the agreed methodology to the Inspector ([ED105](#)). In accordance with the high level programme agreed with the Inspector the Council submitted the third tranche of Main Modifications (MMs) during the week in early June 2020.

7. As previously reported the Council is continuing to work actively to resolve the current situation that has restricted housing and economic development coming forward in the District since 2018 and is working with Natural England to identify potential opportunities to address the backlog of underdetermined applications. The Council continues to undertake work to identify whether an interim approach to managing atmospheric pollution impacts on the EFSAC can be identified to address the backlog of applications. An updated position statement dated 30 April 2020 is available on the website at [ED108](#).

Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

8. The report to Cabinet on [15 April 2020](#) advised that to support the policies set out in the emerging Local Plan in relation to Green and Blue Infrastructure, the protection of ecological assets and high quality design a draft Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy had been developed. The Strategy seeks to address the requirement to provide suitable avoidance or mitigation measures to manage any potential impacts of growth on protected sites, primarily the Epping Forest SAC and a number of SSSI's. This will ensure high quality Green and Blue Infrastructure, including the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANG), is delivered alongside the proposed growth in the District.

9. The public consultation for the Green Infrastructure Strategy commenced on 4 June and runs for a period of 6 weeks until 16 July 2020. This includes a series of workshop/forum events for Members, Youth Council and developers in the District. The intention is that following the consultation and any updates arising that the Final strategy will be brought back to Cabinet for endorsement as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, masterplans/concept frameworks and guide design and implementation processes.

Current progress on the masterplans

10. Work on the masterplans for the Garden Town sites has continued with EFDC officers liaising with key stakeholders across the 5 Garden Town authorities and relevant site promoters. EFDC and Harlow District Council (HDC) met in early May to discuss the masterplanning options for the land at East of Harlow as well as HDC's Main Modifications consultation that closed on 31 May 2020. HGGT Partners have also met with John Lawson Partnership working on behalf of Princess Alexandra Hospital (PAH) to discuss the masterplanning proposals. The Partners are developing the project programme with PAH for the masterplanning process leading up to the submission of a planning application. EFDC and HDC are also arranging a meeting with the main site promoter, Miller Homes, on the land East of Harlow to discuss and agree how to progress the masterplan and prepare a statement of common ground.

11. With respect to Latton Priory, the Garden Town Partners have commissioned a piece of work to evaluate the provision of the access road and sustainable transport corridor to Latton Priory. The initial work prepared by Phil Jones Associates was presented to Garden Town Members in June and is due to be finalised in July. This technical work is needed to address Action 15 identified by the Inspector in her advice note of 2 August 2019 (EB98) and her comments set out in paragraph 33 of that note to review the access proposed to service the site and either modify it or provide further justification for its route. Until this work is completed it is difficult to progress the masterplan work further.

12. A series of meetings have been held between EFDC and the main site promoters at Water Lane to discuss key technical matters, including site access and the Sustainable Transport Corridor (STC). ECC has been involved in these meetings and EFDC continues to liaise closely with them on key matters.

13. The Implementation Team has been proactively engaging with relevant site promoters to progress the other Strategic Masterplan and Concept Frameworks in the District. Some strategic sites are more advanced than others, but good progress has been made. Meetings are being held with the site promoters/developers for the North Weald Bassett, South Epping and Waltham Abbey North Masterplan areas. Initial internal meetings on North Weald Airfield have been undertaken and the contract for masterplanning is now being progressed based on the project brief agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 15 April 2020. Officers are preparing a Planning Performance Agreement in relation to the masterplanning programme.

14. EFDC officers met with the site promoters for the South Epping masterplan area in February to discuss the Inspector's concerns regarding the proposed level of housing on the site and the subsequent technical evidence prepared by their consultants has been reviewed and is being fed into the Main Modifications to the LPSV.

15. The site promoters for the Waltham Abbey North Masterplan area are preparing a community engagement strategy and have been working with EFDC officers to agree the details of a Planning Performance Agreement. Discussions on the two Concept Frameworks are still at an early stage in the masterplan process.

Other allocated sites

16. Alongside the Strategic Masterplan and Concept Framework sites, the Implementation and Development Management Teams have been progressing some of the smaller sites proposed for allocation within the LPSV. As with the strategic sites, some of these proposed allocations are further advanced than others, but officers are encouraged by the progress which has been made to date and work continues to progress their delivery in accordance with the Housing Trajectory.

17. The development proposals for the five Epping town centre sites (St John's, Cottis Lane, Bakers Lane, Civic Centre, Hemnall Street) that Qualis are promoting are the subject of a Planning Performance Agreement and regular meetings are being held between Qualis and planning officers to discuss the development proposals coming forward across the town.

18. A revised planning application was submitted in October 2019 for the Next development proposals at land at Dowding Way. Although the new application represents an amendment to the previous scheme, it has been subject to detailed design discussion with EFDC officers and sent for review to the Quality Design Panel. The Council continues to work with the applicant and Highways England to resolve these issues and those matters concerning the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and officers anticipate reporting the application to District Development Management Committee in July.

19. Appendix A provides an update on the progress of the Masterplans and Concept Frameworks; Appendix B provides an update on the progress of each of the strategic and other allocated sites and Appendix C provides information on other proposals on non allocated sites over 0.2 hectares in size or more than 6 dwellings. Appendix D provides information on the schemes reviewed by the Quality Review Panel.

Resource Implications:

As set out in the 18 October 2018 Cabinet Report, the successful delivery of the Garden Town and the other strategic sites within Epping Forest District will require considerable commitment of officer time from EFDC. The noting of the contents of this report do not give rise to additional resource implications.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The work on the Strategic Masterplans and Concept Frameworks has been developed in accordance with Government policy (NPPF) and Planning Law.

Safer, Cleaner, and Greener Implications:

The Local Plan contains a policy designed to promote the notion of making good places to live, work and visit. This will include safer by design principles, sustainable development, the provision of alternatives to the car, energy efficiency and environmental considerations as well as sustainable drainage systems and quality green infrastructure. Strategic Masterplans and Concept Frameworks will be the mechanism for these place-making measures to be delivered in identified Masterplan Areas.

Consultation Undertaken:

Some of the Strategic sites have been the subject of informal public consultation and engagement. However as set out in the Councils Masterplan and Concept Framework Plan Briefing note, these sites will be subject to public consultation in accordance with an endorsed Statement of Community Involvement.

Background Papers:

C-015-2018/19: Governance arrangements for Local Plan Implementation, 18 October 2018

C-034-2019/20: Implementation of the Local Plan: update on progress 15 April 2020

Inspector's advice after hearings (ED98) 2 August 2019

Housing Implementation Strategy EB401A and B January 2019

Habitat Regulations Assessment (EB209) January 2019

Methodology review for the HRA for the Local Plan (ED105) February 2020

Update on progress of Inspector's actions in her Advice after Hearings (ED106) April 2020

Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation Position Statement (ED108) April 2020

Risk Management:

If the Council was not to take a pro-active stance on the delivery of Masterplans and major applications arising from the Local Plan, there is a real risk of or development occurring of a type that does not extract maximum value for the provision of social infrastructure and poor quality development may occur.