

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 25 April 2017

**Subject:** Planning Policy

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor J Philip

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## **Recommending:**

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

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## **Update on the Local Plan**

1. The report to Cabinet on 9 March 2017 set out the initial high level findings from the consultation with summaries of the key points noted from the analysis of the questionnaire responses which represented about half of the total responses received. A summary of responses from National Bodies, Town and Parish Councils and other Local Planning Authorities was also included. Further work is currently being undertaken to fully analyse all of the responses received, including the 'written verbatim' responses received either as part of the free text in the questionnaire, or as a standalone report, letter or email and a further report will be considered at a future Cabinet meeting. Part of this work will be reviewing the responses to the consultation received from site promoters, landowners and developers. Most of these are from those promoting sites for inclusion within the Local Plan. The issues raised by them will be considered in further detail to inform further site selection work and the pre Submission Plan.

2. The Cabinet on 9 March 2017 also agreed an updated Local Development Scheme which would supersede the previous scheme agreed in July 2016 with the preparation of the single district wide local plan scheduled for submission to the Secretary of State for examination in May 2018. The key issues in managing the programme relate to resources, the ability of external organisations such as Essex County Council in providing timely inputs into plan preparation largely outside our control and the interconnectivity of the various workstreams. The importance of maintaining a full team of appropriately skilled and effective officers and consultants cannot be underestimated and there have been resource concerns with staff leaving/going on maternity leave. In addition the avoidance of diversion of resource to other tasks is a key concern yet matters such as neighbourhood plan advice, development monitoring and assistance do need to be provided. The key workstreams are:

- Update of employment land review to feed into the further site selection work
- Transport modelling
- Local plan viability work
- Joint work to update the employment need within the Functional Economic Market Area and the District to inform the work on site selection
- Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment
- Retail evidence to assess the impact of recent developments outside of the District (including at Chelmsford and Westfield)
- Site Selection work taking account of new sites submitted and

- comments received up to a cut off date of 31 March 2017
- Further work on the Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- Open Space Study, Indoor Sports and Playing Pitch Strategy

3. The Council has established a Developer Forum alongside the progression of the Draft Local Plan to provide a basis for ongoing discussions with relevant landowners, site promoters and stakeholders. It is important that the Council liaises closely on an ongoing basis with relevant landowners and promoters of the sites proposed for allocation within the Draft Local Plan, and with other stakeholders as required in order to:

- i. Demonstrate that the Local Plan is 'effective' and that the allocations in the Local Plan will be viable and deliverable, and therefore meet the 'tests of soundness' at Examination in Public; and
- ii. Ensure that a joined up and 'frontloaded' approach is taken to the planning and delivery of the development of sites proposed for allocation and associated infrastructure, including promoting joint working for sites in multiple ownership, or adjacent allocations.

4. The Developer Forum is split into two groups, one to address the Strategic Sites around Harlow, and the other to consider those that are subject to a draft allocation across the rest of Epping Forest District. Two rounds of meetings have been held to date on 2 December 2016 and 24 February 2017. Terms of reference have now been agreed and this includes a provision for a summary of the areas discussed to be reported to the Neighbourhoods Select Committee. The first report went to the meeting on 21 March 2017.

### **Housing White Paper**

5. The Government published the Housing White Paper '*Fixing Our Broken Housing Market*' on 7 February 2017. This sets out a broad range of reforms that Government plans to introduce to help reform the housing market and increase the supply of new homes. The White Paper includes proposals which may, in time, impact upon the production of Local Plans. However, in many cases the Government has committed to consulting on proposals prior to implementing specific changes to National Planning Policy or Regulations. The proposals in the Housing White Paper are not considered to materially impact upon the proposed modifications to the Local Plan at the current time.

6. The consultation period on the Housing White Paper closes on 2 May 2017. A draft response from the Council was agreed by Neighbourhoods Select Committee on 21 March 2017.

### **Garden Town Funding**

7. The Council was successful (together with East Herts and Harlow Councils) in securing initial Garden Towns funding of £500,000 from DCLG for the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town to support the delivery of strategic sites in and around Harlow. On 31 March 2017 the Council was advised of a further £175,000 of funding for the Project. Unfortunately the three authorities were unsuccessful in the appointment of a Project Director and have agreed to externally commission some initial work to develop a joint vision/objectives for the project, a proposed structure for the team, future governance arrangements and the development of a work programme.

### **Community Housing Fund**

8. EFDC has received funding from DCLG under the Community Housing Fund to promote self build and community led housing schemes. The Council has agreed to work with the other authorities in the SHMA Group on a joint project and reached agreement that the resources allocated to each individual Council will jointly pool the fund. This amounts to a total of £102,672. The SHMA Group is preparing to undertake a research project looking at all aspects of community led housing including self-build and Community Land Trusts. This project will identify existing and new participants for these models of housing delivery. The research will include a series of events and provide information to inform Councillors, Parish Councillors, Neighbourhood Plan groups, self-builders and local residents, about the objectives, benefits and potential, community led housing schemes can bring to communities and local authorities. In addition, the SHMA Group will work with developers of strategic and Garden Town sites to look at how community led housing can be included in future plans.