

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 16 November 2015 **Time:** 7.30 - 10.00 pm

Place: Council Chamber, Civic
Offices, High Street, Epping

**Members
Present:**

Representing Epping Forest District Council:

Councillors E Webster (Chairman), S Jackman (Vice-Chairman),
K Angold-Stephens, A Boyce and B Rolfe

Other Councillors:

Councillors R Bassett, G Chambers, P Keska, G Mohindra, S Neville,
G Waller, S Watson, C Whitbread and J H Whitehouse

Representing Essex County Council:

County Councillors R Gadsby, J Knapman, M McEwen, V Metcalfe,
C C Pond and J M Whitehouse

Representing Local Councils:

K O'Brien (Buckhurst Hill Parish Council), A Patel (Buckhurst Hill
Parish Council), J Share-Bernia (Buckhurst Hill Parish Council),
D Buckle (Epping Upland Parish Council), J Eldridge (Epping Upland
Parish Council), V Evans (Epping Upland Parish Council), M Burgess
(Lambourne Parish Council), A Raven (Lambourne Parish Council),
C P Pond (Loughton Town Council), E Walsh (Loughton Town
Council), T Graham (Matching Parish Council), R Morgan (Matching
Parish Council), T Arnold (Nazeing Parish Council), C Evans
(Nazeing Parish Council), S De Luca (North Weald Bassett Parish
Council), A Tyler (North Weald Bassett Parish Council), N Wilkinson
(Roydon Parish Council), R Northwood (Sheering Parish Council),
J Farren (Stapleford Abbots Parish Council), R Russell (Stapleford
Abbots Parish Council), H Kane (Waltham Abbey Town Council),
K Richmond (Waltham Abbey Town Council) and S Bosworth
(Willingale Parish Council)

Apologies:

Epping Forest District Council:

Councillor M Sartin

Parish/Town Councils:

Epping Town Council

**Officers
Present:**

G Chipp (Chief Executive), A Hall (Director of Communities), S Tautz
(Democratic Services Manager), T Carne (Public Relations and
Marketing Officer), C Wiggins (Safer Communities Manager),
V Loftis (Public Consultation & Engagement Officer) and G Woodhall
(Webcasting Officer)

By Invitation: N Alston (Essex Police & Crime Commissioner), Chief Inspector D Morrissey (Essex Police), U Maccariello (Hastoe Housing Association)

7. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet and that Epping Forest District Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of meetings, including the Local Council's Liaison Committee.

8. PARIS TERRORIST ATTACKS

At the request of the Chairman, members, officers and invited guests stood in silence to honour the victims of the recent terrorist atrocities in Paris.

9. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the following amendment to Minute 4 (Local Plan), the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 June 2015 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record:

'During a question and answer session, the Committee was informed that a new junction for the M11 was being considered as part of the Strategic Transport Assessment for the Harlow area'.

10. ESSEX POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

The Chairman welcomed the Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex, Nick Alston, to the meeting. Mr. Alston was supported by Chief Inspector Denise Morrissey of Essex Police, who had overall responsibility for the operational policing of the Epping Forest District.

The Committee was advised that the Police and Crime Commissioner had no agenda for presentation to the meeting and was willing to respond to questions or concerns on any local policing matters. Members and local councils had been invited to provide prior notification of any specific questions that they wished to raise with Mr. Alston and, in accordance with the usual practice of the District Council, notice of all such questions submitted had been provided to the Police and Crime Commissioner in advance of the meeting. Members of the Committee and representatives of local councils were also invited to raise specific questions with Mr. Alston and Chief Inspector Morrissey, concerning local policing arrangements across the Epping Forest District.

Halloween Disturbances – North Weald Bassett

Councillor S. Jackman of North Weald Bassett Parish Council sought assurances from the Police and Crime Commissioner in respect of public order disturbances that had occurred in North Weald on the evening of 31 October 2015. Mr. Alston advised the Committee that Halloween night was traditionally a very busy period for Essex Police, but that he was satisfied that the response of the force to the issues experienced in North Weald had been appropriate and that no calls to Essex Police had gone unanswered. Councillor Jackman reported that Chief Inspector Morrissey was to attend a meeting of the Parish Council in the near future to discuss the Police's local response to the public order disturbances in greater detail.

Remembrance Day Parades – Police Support

Councillor K. Angold-Stephens of Epping Forest District Council sought an indication from the Police and Crime Commissioner of the reasons why the withdrawal of Essex Police support from the recent Remembrance Day parades was apparently made at such short notice. Councillor Angold-Stephens reported that this approach had not allowed the Royal British Legion or local councils sufficient time to secure the necessary permissions to close roads traditionally associated with such parades.

Mr. Alston advised the Committee that of the approximately ninety parades held across Essex on Remembrance Day, only those scheduled for Epping and Loughton in the Epping Forest District (and Hadleigh elsewhere in the county) appeared to have encountered organisational difficulties with regard to road closures, although not all parades required such arrangements to be in place. Mr. Alston reported that the decision to withdraw police support from Remembrance Day parades had not been taken lightly, but was reflective of the financial situation currently faced by Essex Police. The Committee noted that the decision to withdraw support for parades had been taken by Essex Police in the Summer, but had only been communicated to the District Council in early September 2015, which had left the Council with insufficient time to complete statutory procedures for the temporary closure of the necessary roads.

Mr. Alston accepted that the timing of the confirmation of Essex Police to its future approach to the management of Remembrance Day parades had not been ideal, but that he would be facilitating meetings between relevant councils and the British Legion in the new year, to share learning and understanding of the powers available to the District Council to ensure the continued success of the parades going forward. The District Council confirmed that it had already undertaken to routinely waive all fees and charges associated with temporary road closures for Remembrance Day parades from 2016.

Police Stations – Closure

The Police and Crime Commissioner reported that it had been necessary for Essex Police to undertake a thorough review its property estate, to reflect the need for a more modern headquarters complex and the declining customer requirement for traditional 'front-counter' police stations, whilst also addressing service needs and the modernisation of arrangements for public contact with the Police. The Committee noted that the current property portfolio of Essex Police was generally in poor condition and required significant maintenance investment.

The Committee noted that the rationalisation of the Police's property estate meant that the existing police station in Epping was likely to close (although no decision to this effect had yet been taken) and that Loughton Police Station might therefore form the 'police base' for the Epping Forest District in future. Mr. Alston confirmed that any closure of current police station facilities in the District would not result in reduced levels of policing services to local residents. Councillor C. Whitbread, the Leader of the District Council, reported that officers were currently working with Essex Police to identify possible options for the co-location of police officers within the Civic Offices complex on a partnership basis, to address any closure of Epping Police Station. The Police and Crime Commissioner indicated that he wholeheartedly welcomed such partnership approaches with the District Council.

Gun Licences

Councillor R. Morgan of Matching Parish Council expressed concern with regard to current delays in the renewal of shotgun licences by Essex Police. The Police and Crime

Commissioner reported that this matter was currently an issue of concern across the county that he was already aware of. Mr. Alston indicated that it was essential that licences were only issued after the necessary checks on the suitability of applicants had been completed, but that the current delays were clearly unacceptable. The Police and Crime Commissioner also reported that the charges currently applied for shotgun licences did not cover the costs of the police in undertaking the licensing process and that he intended to review the existing charging regime as a matter of urgency.

Essex Police Precept

Councillor G. Chambers of Epping Forest District Council asked the Police and Crime Commissioner whether the Essex Police precept was likely to be increased above 1% for 2016/17. Mr. Alston reported that only one-third of the funding of the force was met from the precept and that residents of Essex currently paid less for police services than most other areas in the country. Whilst Mr. Alston felt that the precept should therefore ideally be increased by approximately 17.5% to address this deficit, the Commissioner reminded the Committee that precept increases above 2% would be required to be subject a local referendum that would be likely to cost in the region of £2m. Mr. Alston indicated that the experience of other police forces suggested that it would be an inappropriate use of resources to pursue such a referendum.

Police Community Support Officers

Councillor A. Patel of Buckhurst Hill Parish Council indicated that his council remained supportive of the local employment of Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) and wished to pursue this approach, notwithstanding an unsuccessful recruitment exercise earlier in the year that was considered to be due to the uncertainty of future funding for PCSO provision.

The Police and Crime Commissioner confirmed that Essex Police remained committed to the provision of PCSOs, even though their number was likely to reduce significantly in future. Mr. Alston welcomed the interest of local councils in supporting PCSO provision financially, although the Committee was disappointed to note that it was not possible for PCSOs to be appointed to specifically serve particular areas and that the allocation of PCSO responsibilities would remain with Essex Police and might need to be directed towards priorities in other geographic areas, when required by policing circumstances.

The Committee expressed reservations at the possible future reduction in the number of PCSOs in Essex and the likely consequent loss of information and intelligence at 'street-level'.

Savings and Efficiencies

Councillor S. Neville of Epping Forest District Council sought an indication of the likely level of savings to be generated by the rationalisation of Essex Police's property estate, the reduction in the current number of Police Community Support Officers and other ongoing efficiency measures.

Mr. Alston advised that savings and efficiencies were likely to be in the order of £11m and that a significant amount of the capital receipts that would accrue from the reduction in the number of Essex Police's operational properties would be used to fund the construction of a modern headquarters building for the force, at a site still to be identified. As a result, it was not possible to ringfence savings from specific areas, such as from the possible sale of the Epping Police Station site, for reinvestment in police services for particular areas. Mr. Alston confirmed however that operational running

cost savings arising from savings and efficiency measures would be reinvested in the provision of front-line police services for Essex.

Councillor J. Knapman of Chigwell Parish Council questioned why the savings and efficiencies proposals of the Police and Crime Commissioner had not been included within his initial manifesto and suggested that a more open-minded approach was needed to local policing arrangements. Mr. Alston indicated that Essex Police would continue to manage an operational base on the Limes Farm Estate at Chigwell where appropriate, notwithstanding that Chigwell Parish Council had engaged the services of a private security company to 'police' the estate.

In response to a question from Councillor S. Watson of Buckhurst Hill Parish Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner confirmed that his savings and efficiency proposals would have no negative effect on the safety and security of the Epping Forest District, particularly given its proximity to both London and Stansted Airport. Mr. Alston reported that, in the wake of the recent atrocities in Paris, the Prime Minister had announced additional funding for high-level counter-terrorism activity.

Special Constables

Councillor C. C. Pond of Essex County Council suggested that there was a need for increased police 'volunteering', through existing arrangements for the engagement of Special Constables. The Police and Crime Commissioner reported that there were currently 370 appointed Special Constables across Essex, including twelve rural area officers. Whilst Mr. Alston expressed his full support for the Special Constables and increased funding was available for their provision, he felt that it would be more desirable and effective to have greater flexibility over their deployment on general policing matters and allocation to specialist teams. The Committee was advised that over one-hundred volunteer Police Cadets had also been appointed throughout Essex.

Casualty Reduction

The Police and Crime Commissioner confirmed that Essex Police also remained committed to the provision of casualty reduction measures across the county and, although the number of specialist officers that were part of the force's Road Traffic Unit had been maintained to date, these were likely to reduce in future. Mr. Alston confirmed that the operational base of the Road Traffic Unit at Chigwell was likely to be retained as part of the exercise being undertaken to rationalise Essex Police's property estate.

Essex Community Messaging

S. De Luca of North Weald Bassett Parish Council reported that the Essex Community Messaging service that provided for people to receive information, crime prevention advice and notifications from Essex Police and key partners such as Neighbourhood Watch, was not always up-to-date. The Police and Crime Commissioner undertook to raise specific matters concerning inaccurate information with the relevant officers of Essex Police.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked Mr. Alston and Chief Inspector Morrissey of Essex Police for their attendance at the meeting.

11. RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING SCHEMES - PLANNING EXCEPTIONS POLICY

The District Council reported to the Committee on the opportunities available for the provision of affordable housing schemes comprising affordable rented, shared ownership and low-cost market housing, in rural areas of the Epping Forest District.

The Director of Communities advised that an opportunity for the provision of such housing schemes had arisen as a result of the 'planning exceptions policy' contained in the Council's current Local Plan, which recognised that a lack of affordable housing in rural village areas was likely to have a greater effect on individuals and communities than in urban areas, and that the opportunities for increasing the amount of affordable housing was less than in urban areas. Members noted that this was usually because less suitable development sites generally become available in rural areas and local inhabitants were more likely to have to move away from their local area than in larger, urban areas.

The Committee noted that, under the exceptions policy, planning permission could be granted on sites that only provided affordable housing (plus some market housing, if necessary in order to make the development viable) to meet a local housing need, for which planning applications for developments comprising predominantly market housing would be refused. Members were advised however, that certain conditions set out in the Local Plan must be met in relation to schemes, including that the development must be:

- in smaller settlements that have a recognisable community, distinct and separate from the metropolitan area;
- small scale;
- in response to a demonstrable local housing need (identified through a rural housing survey);
- supported by the local town or parish council;
- well-related to the existing settlement; and
- providing predominantly affordable housing in perpetuity.

It was reported that the Local Plan stated that settlements which could be suitable for schemes included Epping Green, Matching Tye, Matching Green, Moreton, Sheering, Fyfield, Willingale, Toot Hill and Stapleford Abbots. Those areas that would specifically not be appropriate included Lower Nazeing, Theydon Bois, Chigwell Row, North Weald Bassett, Sewardstone and Chipping Ongar.

In order to ensure that rural affordable housing schemes only provided accommodation for local residents, applicants were required be:

- long-established local residents (i.e. those who have lived in the village concerned for at least five of the preceding ten years) requiring separate accommodation;
- immediate family dependents of long-established local residents;
- former long-established residents; or
- living elsewhere and could not otherwise take up, or continue to, work in the village.

The Committee was advised that four rural housing schemes had so far been provided in the District under the planning exceptions policy, which had provided a total of 26 affordable homes. Affordable Housing Grant was available from the Homes and Communities Agency to fund rural housing schemes in certain circumstances.

The District Council had previously selected Hastoe Housing Association as its partner for the delivery of rural housing schemes. Hastoe had a wealth of experience in working closely with town and parish councils to assess local housing need and provide rural housing schemes, including three of the four schemes already provided in the District in the past.

Ulrike Maccariello of Hastoe made a short presentation to the Committee, detailing how local housing needs are assessed through a bespoke rural housing survey, the process for the identification of suitable sites, the role of town and parish councils, the forms of

tenure provided for the accommodation, the development process and the safeguards implemented to ensure that only local residents are eligible for the housing schemes.

The District Council reported that the slides from Ms. Maccariello's presentation would be published on its website, alongside the minutes from the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

12. TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 - SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS

The local councils sought clarification of the percentage of affordable housing generally required on new residential developments in the District, in view of a recent High Court judgement handed down to Reading Borough Council and West Berkshire District Council and the subsequent removal of the Government's Planning Practice Guidance on planning obligations relating to affordable housing as a result of the ruling.

The Director of Communities reported that in November 2014, the Government had changed the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), to require that any development comprising of ten dwellings or less with a gross internal floor area of less than 1,000 square metres, would no longer be required to provide any element of affordable housing. Along with all other local planning authorities, the District Council had implemented this change to its current development policy.

The Committee was advised that, in August 2015, Reading Borough Council and West Berkshire District Council had successfully challenged the change to the NPPF in the High Court. The Director of Communities reported that the two councils had claimed that the new policy would reduce the amount of affordable housing across the country by more than 20% and have a particular impact in their particular areas. Members noted that the Judge in the case had quashed the Government's revised policy and had ruled that the change was incompatible with the statutory planning framework. The Government was ordered to pay the councils' costs in bringing the challenge and, as a result of the judgement, the Government subsequently removed the new provisions from the NPPF. Following the judgement, the District Council had returned to its previous affordable housing policies set out in the Local Plan:

- in areas with a population of more than 3,000 people – a requirement for developers to provide 40% affordable housing on sites comprising 15 or more new dwellings, or with a site area 0.5ha or above; and
- in areas with a population of less than 3,000 people – a requirement for developers to provide 50% affordable housing for developments on greenfield sites providing two or more dwellings (or with a site area over 0.1ha) and for developments on brownfield sites providing three or more dwellings (or with a site area over 0.2ha).

The Committee was advised that the Government had recently been granted leave to appeal the decision of the High Court in the Court of Appeal.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted; and
- (2) That a further report be made to a future meeting of the Committee on the outcome of any appeal by the Government against the recent High Court judgement.

13. GREATER ESSEX DEVOLUTION

The local councils requested that, following Essex County Council's commitment to progress its devolution agenda, the District Council share its own plans for taking over services from Essex County Council and/or devolving others to local councils.

The Leader of the District Council, Councillor C. Whitbread reported that the fifteen local councils of Greater Essex (Essex County Council, the district, borough and city councils and the Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock unitary authorities) had been working together to explore and develop devolution proposals which could see the transfer of powers and funding from central Government to a Greater Essex Authority. Whilst the proposals were not yet fully developed and any 'deal' would need to be considered by the Council before a final decision was reached, it was possible that devolution could bring benefits and greater local control over issues such as:

- the growth of the local economy in a sustainable way;
- the application of skills funding to ensure that training matched current and future business need;
- increased inward investment and job creation, and
- initiatives to tackle some of the transport and infrastructure challenges of the area.

The Committee was advised that, in order to agree to devolving power, the Government required the development of proposals that showed ambition in terms of outcomes, strong governance arrangements and a realistic prospect of delivery. Councillor Whitbread reported that, although a high-level submission had been made to the Government in September 2015 to confirm the Greater Essex Partnership's interest in a devolution arrangement, there was still not enough information available to make an informed decision about a final deal and that the case for devolution to a Greater Essex Authority was yet to be made.

The Committee was advised that it was anticipated that a more detailed submission would be made to the Government in December 2015, setting out the basis of a devolution deal and the approach to new governance arrangements, which would commence the detailed negotiation phase with the Government. Members noted that it was not likely that the detail of any final devolution deal, including any new governance model (such as a combined authority), would be available until March 2016 at the earliest. As a result, it was not currently possible to consider the substance of any services or functions that might subsequently be devolved to town and parish councils, although the Chief Executive of the District Council encouraged local councils to consider potential areas for devolution that they might wish to discuss with him or Councillor Whitbread at a later stage in the process. Members were advised however, that it might not be possible for the District Council to delegate responsibility for particular services, the provision of which might be of interest to local councils.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That a further report be made to a future meeting of the Committee once the detail of any devolution deal reached with the Government has been finalised; and
- (3) That pursuant to resolution (2) above, a special meeting of the Committee be convened if necessary, to further consider the devolution proposals of the Greater Essex Partnership.

14. PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The Committee considered a report and presentation of the District Council's Public Consultation and Engagement officer, Mrs. V. Loftis, setting out the ways in which local town and parish councils could support the District Council in undertaking consultation and engagement with local residents.

Members were advised that Epping Forest District Council carried out a significant amount of public consultation and engagement. The Council relied on the support of other organisations to assist its efforts in this regard, not only by providing responses in their own right but also by helping the authority to raise awareness of consultation through their own channels of communication. The Council had adopted a Public Consultation and Engagement Policy, which identified and registered all public consultation carried out by the authority during the year and all planned consultation for the following twelve months. Members noted that an annual report was made to the Governance Select Committee, which scrutinised the methods, costs and effectiveness of consultation. As the Council had to find cost effective ways in which to consult and engage with its stakeholders, the adoption of a common, co-ordinated approach to public engagement improved efficiency and helped to provide value for money.

The Committee noted that, when engaging with the public about a service, policy or any other issue, the focus of the District Council was on finding out the needs, concerns, priorities or satisfaction levels of current and potential service users. The Council was always keen to give people a voice in decisions that concerned them, as this was an effective way of helping them to become involved in improving their quality of life and the services provided by the Council. Members noted that effective public involvement could also help to improve local democracy through openness, transparency and accountability, whilst also enhancing community integration and cohesion.

The District Council reported that the slides from Mrs. Loftis' presentation would be published on its website, alongside the minutes from the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted; and
- (2) That the valuable role that local councils can play in helping the District Council to publicise consultation exercises amongst local residents, businesses and other stakeholders through Parish-based newsletters, noticeboards, meetings, websites, social media and other local communication tools etc., be endorsed.

15. EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN - PROGRESS

The Committee received a comprehensive report setting out the current position with regard to progress on the development of the new Local Plan for the Epping Forest District.

The District Council reported that it had not been possible to meet the previous timetable for the development of the new Local Plan and that the timings for each of the key stages had slipped by about a year, although a revised programme leading to adoption of the Local Plan in September 2018 was now considered to represent a realistic and achievable timetable. The Committee noted that, as a result of the revised Local Development Scheme that had been agreed by the District Council's Cabinet on 11 June 2015, the next Local Plan consultation stage on the draft plan preferred approach would be undertaken during summer 2016.

Members were reminded that a series of member (including Town and Parish Councils) briefing and workshop sessions had been arranged in relation to the development of the new Local Plan, to inform members of emerging key issues that the draft Local Plan would need to cover and to ensure that Member views and concerns might be taken account of in the drafting of Local Plan policies.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

16. COMMUNITY WEDDING VENUES

The Committee was advised that Essex County Council was seeking to identify a suitable local venue to take over the provision of a Community Wedding Venue, which was presently provided at through the Registration Office in Epping. A consultation exercise was currently being undertaken that could result in the closure of the facilities at Epping Registration Office and the County Council were therefore looking to arrange a suitable replacement venue as soon as possible.

Members noted that the concept of a Community Wedding Venue was to provide a discounted wedding venue that allowed couples to undertake a formal wedding ceremony without a need to arrange a reception etc. The discounted rate for the service was shared between Essex County Council and the venue on a roughly equal basis. The type of venue that Essex County Council was seeking to identify would be able accommodate up to 60 people, would be fully accessible to the public and did not offer other wedding ceremonies in the same room (other rooms in the venue could be used for more expensive ceremonies) and was ideally available from Monday to Saturday.

The District Council reported that Essex County Council were happy to discuss its requirements in more detail with individual local councils.

17. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2016/17

The District Council reported that it was currently developing its calendar of meetings for the next municipal year, which would be approved by the Council at its meeting on 15 December 2015.

Members were advised that the calendar had developed over time to meet the needs of the authority and that, where possible, meetings of particular committees were standardised on a particular night of the week. The Committee was therefore asked to indicate is preferred evening for meetings to be held during 2016/17.

RESOLVED:

That, wherever possible, meetings of the Liaison Committee be held on a Monday evening during 2016/17.

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held at 7.30pm on 29 March 2016.

CHAIRMAN