

Report to the Council

Subject: Report to Council by Planning Portfolio Holder

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Richard Bassett

Date: 17th September 2012

Local Plan

The Local Plan consultation, Community Choice – Issues and Options, commenced on the 30th July. We have done a great deal of work publicising the consultation and trying to explain that this is exactly what it says, a list of issues and options which we would like public views on so we can work to produce “preferred options” which will then also be consulted on before a final plan will be submitted for public inspection.

We have started to hold public drop in sessions across the district and these have proved very useful with members of the forward planning team being able to explain things in detail and enable residents to ask questions and get a better understanding of the consultation. I am pleased to report good attendance at the many drop in sessions which are underway across the District. These have been staffed by officers, but have also had attendance by Members, including myself. The sessions are only one of many ways in which we have sought to get local residents, businesses and groups to Get Involved in the Issues and Options consultation.

There is use being made of the information available online, but also hard copies of the consultation and the questionnaire have been provided in significant numbers. There has been a variety of traditional media coverage about the consultation, as well as comments on social media. I also have received several direct letters from individuals and many of these have been where people believe that decisions have already been made when this consultation is as it says, a consultation on issues and options and we need residents' views based on facts. All of the suggestions are there for comment and we are listening.

To ensure that there was widespread knowledge about the consultation, extensive leafleting was undertaken; although there was one area where there were comments about non-receipt. The distribution company used GPS tracking so it was possible to check coverage and one area was redistributed to. The tracking showed extensive coverage of the district. I hope that the leaflet was not mistaken for junk mail in the remaining cases. I understand that in some parts of the country attention is drawn to such consultations by traditional media and by website announcements and they do not always attempt to deliver to individual addresses so we are to ensure we reach as many people as possible; I will keep the balance of cost and effectiveness of these efforts under review.

I will provide regular updates in the Bulletin for members

Changes/relaxation of certain planning rules

I draw attention to a number of announcements by the Government concerning the relaxation of certain requirements for affordable housing, and, subject to consultation and enactment of the precise details, some considerable freedoms for businesses and householders to undertake extensions to their premises. I hope the benefit of these will be taken up carefully, although it may challenge the income which EFDC receives for processing planning applications and the like. I trust those

undertaking such schemes remain alive to the impacts upon their neighbours; after all much construction remains present for many years.

This was one of the items at a meeting of Chairmen and Vice Chairs of Planning committees on the 11th September. We also discussed and made several recommendations on how we can improve information and the decision making process at meetings.

Glasshouse Industry report

As part of the evidence base for the Local Plan we produced a report on the Glasshouse Industry. On the 30th August we had a meeting with representatives of the Lea Valley Growers Association, John Houston, the manager of the LSP, Members of the Forward planning team and the local MP.

Some of the issues discussed was the relationship with the LVRP and a conflict between the remit and limitations of the Park Act and the desire for increasing food production in the area. It was agreed to hold a meeting with LVRP where items to be considered include:

- (i) the long history of the industry in the Lea Valley,
- (ii) the very significant decline in the area covered by glass since the 1960s,
- (iii) the technology improvements and innovations over the last 25 years (which are continuing),
- (iv) the related existing key role in providing technical advice to the broader sector and Government,
- (v) the future trends for and needs of the industry,
- (vi) the food miles and food security advantages of proximity to London,
- (vii) positive environmental issues such as biological control and reduced use of chemicals,
- (viii) the aspirational role of the industry to provide an educational tool/tourism resource at local (including the Park), London and national levels, and
- (ix) the long-term implications of growing national and international competition;

It was also agreed for LSP/EFDC to organise a food summit - bring key stakeholders together to agree common vision for maximising/promoting 'productive landscapes' in the area.

Other Items

We are also trying to arrange a meeting with the Leader and Portfolio holder for Economic Development at Harlow Council so we can discuss common issues of interest such as proposed large housing developments on both our borders. As part of the Local Plan process we are obliged to consult with neighbouring authorities and this is part of that process. I will report back the outcome of that meeting in due course.