

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 26 July 2016

Subject: Planning Policy

Portfolio Holder: Councillor J Philip

Recommending:

That the report of the Planning Policy Portfolio Holder be noted

1) Local Plan timetable

The Local Development Scheme considered by Cabinet on 21 July 2016 updates the timetable for the production of the Local Plan. It sets the consultation on the draft plan on a schedule to run from 31st October for 6 weeks up until 12th December 2016. Prior to the consultation the draft plan will be considered at Cabinet on 6th October and then Council on 18th October 2016. This means that the proposed draft plan, together with the supporting background evidence, will be in the public domain from late September and therefore available for residents and Town and Parish Councils to consider.

This timing aligns with East Herts, Uttlesford and Harlow Districts who are all proposing to publish their draft plans in the autumn for a 6 week period seeking representations on soundness under Regulation 19 of the Local Plans regulations. This is a stage further on in the process from Epping Forest.

The Government has made clear their expectation that all local planning authorities should have a post NPPF local plan and have set out their commitments to take action to get these plans in place with up to date policies. This includes intervening where no local plan has been produced by early 2017 to arrange for the plan to be written, in consultation with local people, to accelerate production of a local plan. One of the penalties proposed for not having produced a plan (although it is not clear yet how this will be interpreted) is the loss of new homes bonus. It is therefore essential that the Council makes good progress this year and to have completed the consultation on our Draft Plan Preferred Approach by the end of the year.

For this reason the focus of the Planning Policy Team is on completing the outstanding work needed in order to go out to consultation on the Draft Plan. Consequently, until the Plan is out to consultation, the team is unable to give as much resource to Neighbourhood Planning as previously. However, the team will continue to signpost to relevant material and grants available.

Duty to Cooperate

Officers and Members continue to meet regularly with appropriate authorities, principally through the Cooperation for Sustainable Development Officer Group and associated Member Board, to consider a wide range of cross boundary issues. The Board met on the 19th April and 6th June 2016 and the Officer Group on 19th May, 13th June and 7th July.

Much of the discussion at these meetings on key cross-boundary matters has been focussed on the 4 authorities within the Strategic Housing Market Area (HMA) and the work undertaken leading to agreement on how the growth will be distributed across the HMA. The Member Board is provided with regular updates on progress with the evaluation of the spatial options previously agreed for testing. This work now includes an option taking into account the potential impact of newly released population projection data on the existing OAN figure in the SHMA. Each of these options has been evaluated through:

1. Transport modelling (what are the transport implications of the different options?)
2. Sustainability appraisal (how does the options effect air quality, biodiversity, water etc.?)
3. Deliverability appraisal (what infrastructure is necessary to deliver the different options?)
4. Habitat Regulations Assessment (how will the different options affect Epping Forest?)

The Board also received three draft memoranda of understanding: one includes Highways England covering strategic transport matters, another which includes Natural England covering Air Quality in relation to the Forest and a third to set out the vision for the SHMA area and to agree the distribution of growth. The final decision on the agreed best strategic spatial option taken at the Board's July meeting is critical to meeting the timeline for consultation on the Local Plan in the autumn.

As previously reported, officers are working with SHMA partners using CLG funding to assess the strategic sites around Harlow. This work will feed into the Council's site selection work (see below). The outcome of this work being undertaken by AECOM is a draft final report for consideration at the Board meeting held on 18 July 2016. Additionally EFDC, Harlow DC and East Herts DC are working on a draft bid to the government's Garden Towns/Cities prospectus in relation to strategic growth in and around Harlow. Government is offering funding to help with evidence costs, staffing etc. and brokerage with government departments.

To help inform the best way to meet the OAHN for the Strategic Housing Market Area further transport modelling work is being undertaken by Essex County Council. This is looking at the implications for the transport network of growth and how it can be distributed across the HMA. The outputs will then be considered by the districts and jointly by the four SHMA authorities at the Cooperation for Sustainable Development Board.

In addition to the input and updating on transport infrastructure and modelling work, Essex County Council has provided details on the recent consultation for construction of a new Junction 7A on the M11, and updates on planned capacity improvements for the existing Junctions 7 and 8. I, with Cllr Bassett, Eleanor Laing MP and Robert Halfon MP met with The Transport Minister Andrew Jones MP to encourage government support for Junction 7a. The meeting was successful and the joint approach carries much weight. Highways England representatives are now attending the Co-op meetings and Herts CC also update the groups on highways matters in their County. Officers continue to keep a close watching brief on transport work being undertaken by the London Borough of Enfield as part of that Council's Northern Gateway Access Package, in particular any discussion of an access road from Bullsmoor Lane / Mollison Avenue onto the M25 between junctions 25 and 26.

Managers at Princess Alexandra Hospital (PAH) have presented recently identifying their need for a new hospital site. Consequently the Co-op Officer Group and Member Board are working with PAH in identifying potential site options in the SHMA-area and then assessing the relative merits of each.

Co-op Member authorities, including EFDC, use the meetings to present Local Plan consultations and work on evidence base documents like Green Belt Reviews and SHMAs, and public consultations such as the recent consultation on M11 J7A and Broxbourne Borough's current Local Plan consultation.

All of the above work and continuing co-operation provides tangible evidence to present to the Inspector when we reach the Local Plan Examination in Public that the four West Essex/East Herts Councils have considered all of the cross-border issues, and relevant options relating to their Local Plans carefully and consistently; thus showing compliance with the Duty to Co-operate.

2) Member Workshops

These workshops have proved to be successful in both informing Members of emerging key issues that the draft Local Plan will cover and ensuring that Members' views and concerns are aired in order that they might be taken account of in the policy drafting.

Since the last Cabinet PFH report in April further workshops have been held on climate change (24 May), transport accessibility and parking standards (31 May) and development management policies (16 July). There will also be a briefing on the proposals for the local plan consultation on 28 July 2016 to which I encourage Members and Town and Parish Council representatives to attend.

3) Update on key evidence work

Work continues on finalising the evidence base reports used to inform the policies included in the Draft Plan (Preferred Approach) that the Council consults on at the end of October.

Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Economic and Employment evidence

These key pieces of technical evidence relating to housing and jobs numbers were completed in 2015 and the reports can be viewed via the Local Plan pages of the Council's website.

The updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) produced in conjunction with the other authorities within our Housing Market Area: East Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford provide figures for Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAHN) for Epping Forest District and the other three Districts. The OAHN figure in Epping Forest District is 11,300 dwellings up to 2033 but it is important to understand that this is not the housing target for the District. As reported above, work is underway with the other SHMA authorities to consider the options for the most appropriate spatial distribution of growth across the area and thereby enable us to arrive at a housing target.

An Economic Evidence report for West Essex and East Herts commissioned jointly by EFDC and East Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford Councils should be read together with a second more detailed report covering 'Economic and Employment Evidence to Support the Local Plan and Economic Development Strategy' completed for EFDC alone. Officers are also updating information in the 2010 Employment study.

Site selection and infrastructure delivery work

The Council's Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) has been updated and site selection undertaken in order to provide options on the preferred sites for allocation. A total of 33 criteria have been used to assess all the sites. Proformas have been sent to promoters of sites to ensure we have correct and up to date information, which will be

important when assessing the availability of sites. Some of the sites were submitted as far back as 2008 so this is an important element of the work. For some of the sites we do not have details of ownership and this will entail undertaking land registry searches. This needs to be completed in order to take complete the final shortlist of sites for potential allocation by the end of July so that they can be included in the draft plan for consultation.

We are also preparing an Infrastructure Delivery Plan to support the sites being selected for the Draft Plan. Initial work has been undertaken to tie in with the site selection work programme to identify physical, social and community infrastructure requirements of the candidate sites

Green Belt Review

Work on the Green Belt Review Stage 2 is being undertaken for the Council by external consultants LUC. Officers have fed comments back to the consultants on a draft final report. The results of this work will be used to inform the Draft Plan and will be published as part of the consultation.

Settlement Capacity Work

Consultants Fregonese Associates have undertaken a settlement capacity study of the District's 10 largest settlements - namely Epping, Theydon Bois, Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell, Loughton/Debden, Waltham Abbey, North Weald Bassett, Chipping Ongar, Lower Nazeing and Roydon. This provides information to determine the potential for additional capacity within existing settlements over and above that originally identified in the SLAA, and so minimise the potential need to utilise Green Belt land for any future growth. All the sites identified have been fed into the updated SLAA and the site selection process. Like Stage 2 of the Green Belt Review, the results of this work are being used to inform, and will be published alongside, the consultation Draft Plan Preferred Approach.

Other evidence base studies

Essex County Council has recently undertaken a Historic Environment Characterisation study of the District. Characterisation is a well-established approach to landscape analysis and management and is specifically identified in the NPPF. The characterisation work will inform the Local Plan and provide guidance to planning officers about the varied and important historic environment of the District. Town and parish councils have also been asked for expressions of interest in participating in work leading to the establishment of a Green Infrastructure Framework for the District. The intention is that this work will produce a Corporate District-wide strategy and used to help inform policies in the emerging Local Plan as well as potentially support neighbourhood planning initiatives.