

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MINUTES

Committee: Cabinet **Date:** 11 March 2021
Place: Virtual Meeting on Zoom **Time:** 7.00 - 7.56 pm
Members Present: C Whitbread (Chairman), N Avey, N Bedford, A Patel, J Philip, S Kane and H Whitbread

Other

Councillors: R Baldwin, P Bolton, L Burrows, S Heap, S Heather, H Kauffman, J Lea, A Lion, S Murray, C C Pond, M Sartin, D Stocker, D Sunger, B Vaz, J H Whitehouse and D Wixley

Apologies:

Officers Present: G Blakemore (Chief Executive), N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), A Small (Strategic Director Corporate and 151 Officer), A Blom-Cooper (Interim Assistant Director (Planning Policy)), J Houston (Specialist Partnerships & Economic Development), S Lloyd-Jones (Sustainable Transport Officer), R Pavey (Service Director (Customer Services)), M Warr (Economic Development Officer), J Warwick (Service Manager (Contracts)), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer) and S Mitchell (PR Website Editor)

155. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Leader of Council made a short address to remind everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the internet, and would be capable of repeated viewing, which could infringe their human and data protection rights.

156. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Pursuant to the Council's Member Code of Conduct, Councillor J H Whitehouse declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 11 – 'Update on Business Database Development', by virtue of being a trustee of Epping Forest Re-use. The Councillor had determined that her interest was non-prejudicial and that she would stay in the meeting for the consideration of the item.

157. MINUTES

Decision:

That the minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 21 January and 11 February 2021 be taken as read and would be signed by the Leader as a correct record.

158. REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

The Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, Councillor Philips reported that they had launched 'Click it Local', a local traders click and collect service. So far

20 businesses had signed up to it. Other authorities have also joined this scheme or were looking to join. He encouraged the public to visit www.clickitlocal.co.uk where they would find a number of businesses within our district that they could make use of.

The Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor Patel updated the meeting on the incident at North Weald Airfield on Tuesday night. A single engine plane had experienced problems with its landing gear, but eventually made a successful landing. During this incident both the Air Ambulance and the Fire Services had been alerted but were not needed.

The Customer and Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor S Kane asked members to keep their eyes open on Social media and the Epping Forest website for a new platform called 'Develop Me', an interactive Job website designed to help residents find jobs, build their profiles and skills and write their CVs. This platform works across three districts (including Harlow and Uttlesford).

The Housing and Community Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor H Whitbread, noted that last night they had a virtual public meeting with the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner, where they had a lot of public engagement and received a lot of interesting questions. She went on to flag that at next Stronger Communities Select Committee they would have the District Commander for Brentwood and Epping Forest,

Antony Alcock, where they would also be reporting back on the Community Safety Partnerships annual report.

159. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE CABINET

The Cabinet noted that no public questions or requests to address the Cabinet had been received for consideration at the meeting.

160. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee reported that they had not had a meeting since the last Cabinet and therefore had nothing to report. However, she noted that they had now received answers to questions from NEPP and these would be put into the Council Bulletin for information.

161. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LOCAL PLAN: UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder, Councillor Bedford introduced the report on the update of the implementation of the Local Plan.

He noted that this report provided members with an update on the progress of Strategic Masterplans, Concept Frameworks and Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) within the District, including major projects and planning applications dealt with by the team. Scheduled meetings and workshops were taking place with site promoters and developers in accordance with project plans agreed within PPAs, albeit virtually. Project programmes were being adjusted where necessary to account for the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular community engagement arrangements.

The Council had adopted the Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy. Following consultation on the draft strategy approved by Cabinet on 20 July 2020, Natural England had now confirmed that if the measures identified in the Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy were secured through appropriate policy wording within the emerging Local Plan to provide the necessary link between the Habitat Regulations

Assessment and the mitigation they consider that it could provide a sound strategy for the purposes of avoiding and mitigating air quality impacts on Epping Forest SAC that result from plan led development. The Council would be proposing Main Modifications to Policies DM 2 and DM 22 to the Inspector to address this matter and would be finalising the HRA to take account of the latest evidence. Pending the adoption of the Local Plan the Council can adopt the strategy to support the Local Plan HRA process and facilitate the determination of planning applications which have the potential to have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Epping Forest SAC in relation to atmospheric pollution without mitigation.

Councillor Philip welcomed the renewal of the Quality Review Panel contract noting that this would be of benefit to the District and also lined up with the Governments drive for higher build quality. He asked when the appendix of allocated sites was updated as he thought the second site listed there had changed status since. Councillor Bedford said that he would have this checked out.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse asked about the South Epping Masterplan, noting that the ward councillors had not seen this as yet. Could they have a copy. Councillor Bedford noted that this was not yet in the public domain, but he would get officers to speak to her privately about this.

Decision:

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 was noted.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To ensure that members were 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.

162. SUSTAINABILITY GUIDANCE FOR THE DISTRICT AND HARLOW AND GILSTON GARDEN TOWN

The Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder, Councillor Bedford introduced the report.

The Council's emerging Local Plan set out policies in relation to sustainable and high quality design and construction of developments. On 19 September 2019 the Council declared a Climate Emergency, including a resolution to do everything within the Council's power to make Epping Forest District carbon neutral by 2030. To support these policies and this declaration, the Council had produced draft Sustainability Guidance and Checklist documents for use across the District; Volume 1: Major Developments (10+ units) and Volume 2: Minor Developments (1-9 units). These documents were in addition to the draft HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist, which had been produced for sites located both within Epping Forest District and the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town. All three draft documents were approved by Cabinet for the purposes of public consultation on 19 October 2020.

This report set out the changes proposed to the draft EFDC Sustainability Guidance and Checklist documents (Volume 1: Major Developments and Volume 2: Minor Developments) and the draft HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist following the consultation process and sought Cabinet endorsement of these documents.

The report provided members with an update of progress in respect of Volume 3 and outlined a summary of the aims, objectives and purpose of the Volume 3 guidance. Further, the report requested that the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Sustainability was given delegated authority to approve the final draft of Volume 3 for public consultation. Following public consultation and any updates arising, the final Volume 3 guidance would return to Cabinet for endorsement as a material consideration in the determination of householder planning applications.

Councillor Philip welcomed the report and the new Director of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town whose appointment had been announced recently.

Councillor Heap also welcomed the report but noted that he could not see the difference between major and minor developments; there also seemed to be no cost benefits mentioned; and there was still no insistence for PVs on all new dwellings. He also wanted to know how SP3 became SP2. He was told that that they had renumbered the policies as one (SP1) had been removed.

Councillor Wixley wanted to know what LETI stood for, as it was mentioned in paragraph 12 of the report. He was told it was the London Energy Transformation Initiative, a network of built environment professionals that gave guidance to support a path to a zero carbon future.

Decision:

(1) The Cabinet noted the public consultation process and outcomes and endorsed the Epping Forest District Sustainability Guidance and Checklist documents (Volume 1: Major Developments Appendix A and Volume 2: Minor Developments Appendix B) as material planning considerations for the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes within the District.

(2) The Cabinet noted the public consultation process and outcomes, and endorsed the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) Sustainability Guidance and Checklist (Strategic Sites) (Appendix D) as a material planning consideration for the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes within the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town.

(3) The Cabinet agreed that the Planning Services Director, in consultation with the Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder be authorised to make minor amendments to the EFDC Sustainability Guidance and Checklist documents (Volume 1: Major Developments and Volume 2: Minor Developments) and HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist prior to their final publication.

(4) The Cabinet noted progress made on the Draft EFDC Sustainability Guidance and Checklist Volume 3: Extensions and Refurbishments (Appendix F) and gave delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder to approve the Guidance for public consultation for a six week period.

(5) The Cabinet noted that, following consultation and any subsequent revisions, it was intended that the final EFDC Sustainability Guidance and Checklist Volume 3 would be considered by Cabinet for endorsement as a material planning consideration for assessing householder planning applications (for extension or refurbishment work to an existing building), pre-application advice, and any other development management purposes within the District.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To ensure that both the EFDC Sustainability Guidance and Checklist documents (Volume 1: Major Developments and Volume 2: Minor Developments) and the HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist were afforded suitable planning weight by endorsing them as material considerations in the planning process. This would ensure that development proposals across the District contributed to the Council's sustainability ambitions, and that clear parameters were established for future pre-application advice, preparation of masterplans, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes.

To agree that the draft EFDC Sustainability Guidance and Checklist Volume 3: Extensions and Refurbishments was delegated to the Portfolio Holder to agree for the purposes of a 6 week public consultation period.

Other Options for Action:

Not to agree the EFDC Sustainability Guidance and Checklist documents (Volume 1: Major Developments and Volume 2: Minor Developments) and HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist or endorse the three documents as material considerations in the planning process, which would mean that there would be no guidance to support the delivery of development proposals and achieve the objectives set out in the Council's emerging Local Plan policies SP3, DM5, DM9, DM11, DM15-22.

Not to agree the draft EFDC Sustainability Guidance and Checklist Volume 3: Extensions and Refurbishments is delegated to the Portfolio Holder to agree for the purposes of a 6 week public consultation, which would mean that there would be no mechanism to support the delivery of sustainable extension and refurbishment of existing dwellings.

163. DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS FOR ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

The Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, Councillor J Philip introduced the report on digital infrastructure investment.

Epping Forest DC and Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone, which the council initiated, had been working, since its formation, to deliver digital infrastructure investment across the DIZ geography, including in Epping Forest District. The council, working with its partners at Essex CC and with the private sector had helped lever in approximately £24m in investment in digital infrastructure in the district. Key achievements in this work programme were set out in the report.

This investment was considered critical to current economic development and the district's future economic resilience and was a fundamental underpinning layer to support the Council's ongoing work to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The infrastructure was central to maximising the ability of the district's residents and businesses to engage in an increasingly online world whether that is

through delivering goods and services online, working from home, studying from home, shopping locally using online platforms or accessing vital public services digitally.

Additionally, the DIZ has been working to build the reputation of the area as a place to invest and progress on this workstream.

Building its reputation has led to an approach from Connected Places Catapult to potentially fund an Internet of things (IoT) project focused on air quality at and on route to schools. The project would analyse and identify patterns in air quality in order to engage with, and influence the behaviour of, school children and their families in respect of healthy and sustainable travel to school. Public health was a key priority for the Council and this project would seek to enable residents to make informed decisions about how they might improve their health and living environment through the choice of alternative routes and transport. The DIZ was liaising with partners over the funding requirement for such a project and this report sought Cabinet approval in principle for the council to potentially be the single or prime funder for such a project. Approval was sought for up to £35,000 funding for this project, the funding to come from existing allocations of resources in the Capital Budget for environmental and climate change related projects.

Councillor Bedford welcomed this report especially the monitoring of contamination around school gates.

Councillor Patel also welcomed this report in preparation for when businesses started to function again.

Councillor Lion said that this gave amazing returns in investment to the council. The GP programme was moving forward and this was good to see.

Councillor C Whitbread thanked Councillor Lion for his input into these projects over the years. The value for money gained from these were superb. The important thing learned from this was the importance of digital innovation, which the past 18 months has shown and these changes would be great for our communities in the future.

Decision:

(1) The Cabinet noted and endorsed the contribution of the digital infrastructure investment approach, developed and pursued by the Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) and EFDC Economic Development team, to the economic resilience of Epping Forest district and the district's ongoing recovery response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

(2) The Cabinet agreed, in principle, to the potential investment of up to £35,000 of partnership funding to explore an IoT project with the Connected Places Catapult and Digital Catapult to monitor air quality at and on route to school gates, the funding to come from existing Capital Budget allocations for environmental and climate change related projects.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The DIZ is liaising with partners over the funding requirement for such a project and this report seeks Cabinet approval in principle for the council to potentially be the single or prime funder for such a project.

Other Options for Action:

A reduced maximum investment in the air quality project could be agreed. This may impact on the council's ability to secure participation in the project. The council could also choose not to agree any funding for this project which would mean any participation would be dependent upon other organisational partners of the DIZ choosing to fund the project and locate the pilot site within the district.

164. UPDATE ON BUSINESS DATABASE DEVELOPMENT

The Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder introduced this report.

In July last year members approved a series of measures to assist economic recovery in the district. The development of the database and new methods of communication were a key element underpinning this process.

There were in excess of 8,000 businesses in the Epping Forest District. 92% of these were categorised as micro (0-9 employees), with a further 3% defined as small. Epping Forest businesses have, like so many other businesses in the UK suffered severe disruption with the effects of COVID and needed support and advice from the local authority. To assist the Council to effectively engage with local businesses, a database had therefore been purchased from an external company which included contact and email addresses. A staged approach to further develop the database and Economic Development's capacity to engage with and support local businesses was set out in the report.

Councillor Patel welcomed the report noting that one of the difficulties the council had was in communicating information with local businesses, this was a welcomed way to overcome this.

Councillor H Whitbread said that this was really good piece of work that she welcomed; it was a useful tool for the local businesses. She noted that Essex County Council had a really good Economic Development newsletter with useful links and information for businesses and asked if it would be publicly available? Councillor Philip said that the current intention was just to send it out to the people on the database, but he would see if they could share it with members.

Councillor Bedford said that he was very pleased with this piece of work and was glad that it was now coming together.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse was please to see this report but was concerned that this seemed primarily concerned with limited companies as the sole traders would also benefit greatly by this database. It was hoped that the newsletter would be shared among the traders, but also, if it could be shared with members, they could share it with the smaller businesses.

Councillor Sunger said that it was good to reach out and it was vitally important that we reached out to local businesses.

Councillor Philip commented that that he would encourage members, that if they were passing the newsletter onto businesses, they would want to get them on the list and get their information on our database. We also know that the vast majority of businesses in our district were micro or small so they making sure they got this across the range of businesses.

Councillor Heap asked how we were informing businesses of this. He was told that was part of the work they were doing at present but if a councillor wanted to assist in this, they should point any business they were in contact with to our Economic Development team.

Decision:

Cabinet noted and endorsed:

- 1) the progress in development of a corporate business database to assist the council to engage with and support local businesses; and
- 2) Plans to develop an online, monthly economic newsletter, sent directly to local businesses, including information on grants and other support, new initiatives, surveys etc.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To support the Council's economic recovery programme and underpin the Council's digital outreach to, and support of, businesses in Epping Forest District.

Other Options for Action:

To continue with the current corporate approach and direct mail.

165. CALENDAR OF COUNCIL MEETINGS 2021-22

The Customer and Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor S Kane introduced the report on the Calendar of Council meetings for 2021/22.

He noted that the Cabinet considered the calendar of meetings each year prior to its final approval by the Council. The calendar had been developed over time to meet the changing needs of the authority and again no fundamental changes had been proposed.

Decision:

That Cabinet recommended the draft Calendar of Council Meetings for 2021/22 to the Council for adoption.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To review the proposed Calendar of Meetings for 2021/22, prior to its final adoption by the Council.

Other Options for Action:

Individual frequencies of meetings could be varied. In practice, additional meetings are added as and when issues dictate. Similarly, meetings can be cancelled if there is a lack of business.

166. AMENDMENTS TO THE ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS GRANT POLICY FOR BUSINESS SUPPORT

The Customer and Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holder along with the Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the amendments to the additional restrictions grant policy for business support.

They noted that the pandemic had impacted on businesses right across the Epping Forest District. The Council had worked hard to ensure the timely distribution of central government and local government support funding direct to local businesses. This direct support was critical to the continued survival of many businesses in a variety of different sectors. This report reviewed current performance, suggested revisions to policy and approach linked to experience of administration and the needs of local businesses. Amendments to current policy and establishment of new funding priorities for local action were included.

Councillor C Whitbread had nothing but praise for the officers getting these grants out to the various businesses; he noted that it had not been easy, but they had worked tirelessly to achieve this. These grants were very important to the businesses and we have the grants there, so we want them to come forward and apply for what they were entitled to.

Decision:

The Cabinet approved:

1. That those businesses already awarded a grant under the Additional Restrictions Grant Policy received a further payment for the same amount;
2. That the ARG scheme be extended to:
 - a) taxi drivers licensed by EFDC who would receive a single payment of £500 each;
 - b) driving instructors with Approved Driving Instructor (ADI) registration who would receive a single payment of £1,000 each;
 - c) kennels and catteries.
3. The use of up to £500,000 to fund key programmes in the priority areas identified in the report as part of an Economic Resilience Fund.
4. That future changes to the ARG scheme were delegated to the Customer Service Director in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Corporate Services and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To ensure practice on business grant distribution and business support reflects changes in the needs of local businesses and the local economy.

Other Options for Action:

To maintain the current approach.

167. COVID 19 - DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS - TRAVEL LOCAL DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT (DRT) TRIAL

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental and Technical Services, Councillor N Avey introduced the report on the Travel Local Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) Trial.

He noted that in December 2020, Cabinet approved a three-month trial of a 'hybrid' Demand Responsive Transport (DaRT87) service with Epping Forest Community Transport (EFCT), to replace Arriva's 87 service which ECC felt unable to subsidise further. The trial commenced on time on 2nd January. Given it was a new concept, set up with very little notice and run during a lockdown suppressing all but essential travel, it could be judged to have been a success, justifying strong consideration of extension further into 2021. By industry norms, a three month trial was also too short to prove and refine the marketing approach and to fully test and show the benefits of new technology such as the journey booking app which was still in beta trial in Q1.

Councillor Philip welcomed the report. He was pleased to see that significant use was being of this service and he expected this to be used more in the coming months. He was looking forward to seeing the council using the best environmental transport methods as possible. It would be good to extend it for a further year to establish if a service like this would work in this district and was happy to see it was within budget.

Councillor H Whitbread said that she would like to see more promotion of this project. Councillor Avey said that he was looking at more promotion and publicity for this service.

Councillor Bedford said that this was a good initiative, essential for our key workers and key for our future. Councillor S Kane also supported it and expressed the hope that the second route went through Waltham Abbey.

Councillor Chris Pond noted that a good start had been made on this service, but there had been considerable public confusion. The registration process was cumbersome, but there was potential to be more useful in the future. Councillor Avey said that they would look at the registration process to make it simpler.

Councillor Heap said it was a good system but did need to be made easier to use. Councillor Murray agreed.

Councillor C Whitbread thanked the officer team for their hard work in setting this trial up.

Decision:

- (1) The Cabinet noted the good progress being made on the commencement of trial flexible Demand Responsive Transport (DaRT87) bus service which commenced on 2 January 2021 and the challenges posed by ongoing restrictions due to Covid-19;
- (2) The Cabinet agreed to extend the trial for a full year from 1 April 2021 to enable the service to build on experiences in the lock down period and benefit from higher number of journeys and vehicle capacity once the lockdown eased;
- (3) The Cabinet agreed, to allocate £85,000 from the Sustainable Travel Projects for a full year trial of the Demand Responsive Transport (DaRT87) bus service to be operated by Epping Forest Community Transport (EFCT); to be offset by fare revenue returned by EFCT;
- (4) The Cabinet agreed that a report be presented to Cabinet post election with the progress of the trial and opportunities to extend the DRT service to other parts of the District to improve connectivity; and

(5) The Cabinet agreed to set aside Procurement Rules to enable the extension of the Contract with EFCT.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To accept the positive trajectory of the initial trial (against the odds) as evidence of demand for a novel service such as DaRT87 which can grow a lot more as Covid restrictions relax and potentially expand to cover other areas of the District. This report outlines evidence and assumptions that show a higher passenger capacity later in 2021 would mean the service can be closer to self-sufficiency or even generate a surplus for reinvestment. There are also possibilities for financial support from DfT's Covid Bus Recovery Fund if the trial is extended and has proven demand. The trial supports the Council's Climate Change Declaration and our Local Plan's focus on sustainable transport protection and growth, as well as retaining a much-needed connection between SW Harlow, Epping Green, Epping, Theydon Bois and Loughton.

Other Options for Action:

All the evidence, both county and UK-wide is that public subsidy of bus services will be under severe pressure for years. Ceasing the DaRT87 trial at this stage would leave residents open to further inconvenient and/or reduced bus options via a financially stressed ECC. It could be speculated that ECC and Trustybus would combine the 542 (Loughton-Debden town circular) and 418 routes to a single service replicating parts of the old 87, minus any direct link to Harlow and also effectively cutting off Epping Green and Theydon Bois from all or much of their bus service.

168. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no other urgent business for consideration by the Cabinet.

169. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Cabinet noted that there was no business for consideration which would necessitate the exclusion of the public and press from the virtual meeting.

CHAIRMAN