

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NOTES OF A MEETING OF STRONGER PLACE SELECT COMMITTEE  
HELD ON THURSDAY, 9 JULY 2020  
IN VIRTUAL MEETING ON ZOOM  
AT 7.00 - 9.15 PM**

<b>Members Present:</b>	R Bassett (Member) (Chairman), S Heather (Vice-Chairman), R Brookes, L Burrows, I Hadley, S Heap, J Jennings, S Jones, C McCredie, J Mclvor and R Morgan
<b>Other members present:</b>	S Kane, H Kauffman, S Murray, A Patel, J Philip, H Whitbread, J H Whitehouse and J M Whitehouse
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	None.
<b>Officers Present</b>	A Blom-Cooper (Interim Assistant Director (Planning Policy)), N Cole (Corporate Communications Officer), N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), D Fenton (Service Manager (Housing Management & Home Ownership)), Q Durrani (Service Director (Contracts & Technical Services)), J Gould (Housing Needs and Older Persons Services), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), J Houston (Strategic Partnership Specialist and Economic Lead), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), R Pavey (Service Director (Customer Services)) and N Richardson (Service Director (Planning Services))

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**1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION**

The Chairman made a short address to remind all present that the virtual meeting would be broadcast on the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

**2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

The following substitution was reported:

That Councillor R Brookes was substituting for Councillor H Kauffman.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- (a) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Conduct, Councillor J Mclvor declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 7, Covid-19 - Places, by virtue of owning several businesses that had received Business Support Grants from the Council.
- (b) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Conduct, Councillor J M Whitehouse declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 13, Group company structure – Epping Town Centre sites, by virtue of living in St John's Road and was a member of Epping Town Council.

**4. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

Councillor J Jennings was pleased to see the new type of litter bin in the High Road, which had different compartments for different types of waste. However, with regard

to the Waste Management Contract – Current Performance (Min no 29), she remarked on a recent survey that apparently showed most residents preferred recycling sacks to another bin and that the Council should take this into consideration.

**RESOLVED:**

That the notes of the last meeting of the Stronger Place Select Committee held on 9 December 2019 be agreed as a correct record.

**5. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman apologised that there were quite a few verbal reports being given at this meeting as it had been rescheduled at short notice because of the ongoing coronavirus situation. In future, he would look forward to receiving written reports from officers, as this would allow members to scrutinise items more effectively.

Councillor C McCredie asked about work programme item 1, Covid-19 – Places, regarding local economic business recovery and whether traders at the Epping town market would receive business support grants. The Service Director (Customer Services), R Pavey, replied that in terms of the current scheme, the business support grant had been discretionary and market traders had not been included.

The Select Committee noted its Terms of Reference.

**6. COUNCIL HOUSEBUILDING PROGRESS REPORT - PHASES 2 - 4**

The Committee agreed to bring forward agenda item 12 at the request of the Service Manager (Housing Management & Home Ownership).

The Service Manager (Housing Management & Home Ownership), D Fenton, reported on the progress of phases 2 to 4 of the Council's housebuilding programme, for developments completed on-site and currently being procured. On phase 2 (Burton Road, Loughton - HR107), of the 51 properties, six units been delayed due to a gas supply problem but were completed and handed over on 19 March 2020. On phase 3 (Queens Road, North Weald - HR116) the original start had been delayed with the discovery of asbestos. The contractor was some four weeks behind schedule because of service utility delays, and there was also the potential for further delays caused by Covid-19 restrictions.

Phase 4.1 comprised 14 properties at five sites in Loughton and Ongar. The contractor had commenced works on 29 June 2020 at two Loughton sites, but would stagger starts at the other sites in August and September to comply with new working arrangements. The handover was forecast for June 2021. Phase 4.2 for 22 properties at seven sites in Buckhurst Hill, Loughton and Waltham Abbey had gone out to tender and a report was due to go to the next Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee (CHBCC). Phase 4.3 for 21 properties at seven sites, one in Buckhurst Hill and six in Waltham Abbey, had gone out to tender. It was anticipated works would commence in November 2020 and complete between November 2021 and March 2022. In phase 4.4, properties at four sites in Loughton had undergone a detailed design review, which would potentially increase the affordable units by 12 to a total of 27.

In phase 5, a detailed review to identify several potential sites for future development was almost finished. However, a different approach would be taken by officers to

include engagement and to work with local councillors to discuss and address any local issues that these development sites might have. It was anticipated that a Members Briefing would be organised to highlight this approach and present officers' aspirations before the submission of planning applications. Once sufficiently progressed, a Feasibility Report would be presented to CHBCC for consent to proceed and progress to the planning application and delivery stage.

Councillor R Bassett asked about the large variation of over £1 million on phase 2. The Service Manager (Housing Management & Home Ownership) replied this was in connection to the fire issue and gas works. Previously, Housing's approach on finance had been more to do with due diligent work that had been undertaken. Housing Development Manager, J Cosgrave, was the project manager, and they were confident that going forward financial steps had been put in place to ensure the financial forecast was accurate. The Council's Housebuilding programme was a 30-year business plan and therefore, it was vital to understand the viability of schemes.

Councillor S Heap was enthused by the Housing officers' new approach and future interaction with councillors, and that Housing was doing an excellent job on the Council housebuilding programme. The Service Manager (Housing Management & Home Ownership) replied that officers were looking at further sites that would be viable for more properties and were working with the Local Plan.

Councillor S Murray agreed with Councillor Heap about the new, exciting approach to be taken on phase 5, but would this engagement be with ward councillors and other councillors within a community? The Service Manager (Housing Management & Home Ownership) replied that engagement would initially be with ward councillors. Officers would be looking at communities to create places where people would want to live and be seeking Cabinet agreement on these sites. There would be collaboration going forward.

Councillor J Jennings remarked that Epping Forest was an expensive District to live in. There was a huge need for affordable housing and for more availability of Council housing, as private developers did not build affordable housing.

The Chairman was pleased to see the progress being made and that this Council was one of the few councils to have an active housebuilding programme.

**RESOLVED:**

That the contents of this Progress Report on Phases 2 to 4 of the Council Housebuilding Programme be noted.

**7. COVID-19 - PLACES**

**(a) Business support – grant**

R Pavey, Service Director (Customer Services) reported that the Government had been keen for the quick distribution of the small business support grant and retail, leisure and hospitality grant, which amounted to £29 million - £30 million for the Epping Forest District. The Council had distributed 90 per cent of the grant within two weeks to businesses in the District. A mandatory requirement was that it was to help businesses cover high property costs that could demonstrate a loss of income because of the Covid-19 lockdown. An additional grant of £1.5 million had been received for another 5 per cent of businesses that had not received a grant originally and had been aimed at small businesses in shared offices spaces where they were

not the ratepayer, bed and breakfast establishments and some charities. The focus had been on regular market traders with fixed property costs at covered markets where there was daily trading, rather than the District's open markets one day / a week. There were some discretionary elements within the criteria for the grants that Cabinet had chosen to support. The Council had received 250 applications of which some had been paid a grant, some were still being processed, but some had been turned down. The Council was anticipating an underspend. After the current application phase, the Council might have other options to use the grant money.

Councillor R Bassett asked that as he was the trustee of a community transport charity that provided a service, could the charity apply for a grant as it had fixed property costs in St John's Road, Epping, and paid its electric utility bills to Essex County Council. The Service Director (Customer Services) advised the charity to submit an online application via the Council's website.

Councillor J McIvor was appreciative of the exceptional job officers had done in supporting businesses with the initial business grants. He asked where businesses had since ceased trading before Covid-19 but had received grants, would the Council cancel these cheque payments and how would the Council be auditing these payments in relation to fraud? The Service Director replied that the Business Rates Register had been used and a number of cheques had been returned, but work was ongoing on actions against fraud. If the Council became aware of such cases, fraud officers would investigate. This had also instigated a data cleansing exercise as well.

Councillor S Heap asked about small businesses with huge premises, for example at North Weald or Stapleford Abbots, and did the Council have the discretion to assess applications? The Service Director (Customer Services) replied that the scheme had a cap on the rateable value of premises, which was £51,000. The Government would need to be asked if there was flexibility in phase 2, as it would be auditing the Council on those grants. This might also bring other properties into the scope of the grant, but the Council would have to manage the scope to remain within budget.

Councillor C McCredie asked if grants to traders at Epping market had been considered an option as they had complained to her and if this could be looked into further. The Service Director (Customer Services) replied that local market traders were not in the scope of this phase. In the next phase, the Council would see how much funding was left and then look at other applications.

Councillor J McIvor asked if the Council was keeping a list of businesses that had consistently failed to receive these grants and would this be reported back to the Government. The Service Director (Customer Services) replied that officers were gathering information with the end of the first phase and had reached out to businesses in shared office spaces but he was not aware of any businesses missing out. The Government had stepped in to help with other industries, such as nurseries with free business rates for 2021. The Council was keeping records on this and would liaise and provide feedback to the Government.

## **(b) Safer spaces**

The Interim Assistant Director (Planning Policy and Implementation), A Blom-Cooper, reported that safer spaces had been set up in response to Covid-19 to support the reopening of the high streets and to support active travel. Essex County Council (ECC) had been awarded up to £1.9 million to support this scheme. The Council submitted bids to ECC for Epping and Waltham Abbey but only one bid was forwarded to Central Government. However, ECC had received less than half of the

total value of the bids, as many of the ECC schemes put forward had not met the criteria. The monies were with ECC so it was not known what the Council would be able to spend. The extension of pavements (so they were less of a trip hazard) to facilitate market traders and social distancing, planters, cycle racks and lockable bollards were being looked into and would continue to be reviewed by the Council. Looking forward to additional Central Government funding, the Business and Planning Bill was going through Parliament, which would licence tables and chairs on pavements. Therefore, the Council was concentrating on hospitality business areas in Buckhurst Hill, Loughton and Ongar and was evaluating bid costings to submit to Central Government.

Councillor S Murray was pleased to hear this progress but asked on what basis were bids for Epping and Waltham Abbey put forward first, as Loughton was busier? Therefore, what criteria was used for the order of towns in the District and at which meeting was this decided? The Interim Assistant Director replied the Council had to submit the bids very quickly and had looked at schemes that had already been identified in our infrastructure delivery plan, as officers had the evidence to use in the bids.

Cllr J McIvor asked what evidence and information were required to make such an application? Ongar was a failing high street before Covid-19, was there a way that funding could be used for high streets like Ongar which were in need of support? The Interim Assistant Director replied that it depended on what Government criteria was required for the next tranche. Epping had been put forward by ECC as it had best met these criteria but ECC had not received all the funding. The criteria were detailed in a 30-page Government document, the details of which could be supplied to the councillor but she did not know how ECC had chosen the schemes.

Cllr A Patel advised that the Safer Spaces Team held regular meetings and was looking at various schemes that the Government was bringing forward. Officers were working to make high streets safer in relation to social distancing measures with Town Centre Partnerships. The Economic Development Team was carrying out individual surveys of high streets to see which business premises could use pavements and if this would result in any loss of parking spaces.

Councillor S Heap thanked officers for all their work on this, but as 40 per cent of the District population lived in Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell and Loughton, the Council should concentrate on those areas.

Councillor J M Whitehouse asked how much of the £60,000 grant had been spent / remained; what was the initial feedback on the scheme; and what was the measure used about interventions? The Interim Assistant Director replied that no information on the budget had been received from ECC. Not one of the schemes received full funding because of a Government cut in spending. The Council had a live Commonplace website to help identify pinch points in the District and had so far received over 2,000 responses, but only one complaint had referred to loss of parking. If you clicked on the map on the Commonplace website, you could look at the comments reported on a pinch point. A report would be going to Cabinet on 20 July 2020. Councillor J M Whitehouse asked about a qualitative assessment on the change in traffic levels. The Interim Assistant Director replied that traffic levels were back up to pre-Covid-19 levels, which officers would be assessing.

Councillor J McIvor asked which high streets were most at risk on social distancing and therefore, least safe in terms of adequate social distancing? The Interim Assistant Director replied that Epping had posed some challenges, especially as the

market had created some pinch points. Ongar had very narrow pavements and the scope for more pavement space was very limited. Pinch points in Loughton were also being investigated.

Cllr A Patel said that for Buckhurst Hill, work was ongoing on assimilating scheme costings on what was feasible and what was already there. The Interim Assistant Director welcomed member interaction on this project and had identified some councillors with whom officers were liaising with already.

Councillor R Bassett remarked that the coronavirus had posed a new situation and officers were working it out, but it all took time and resources were limited.

**(c) General economic measures and support, and local economic business recovery**

The Partnerships and Economic Development Specialist, J Houston, reported that these were unprecedented economic times. The Council's economic strategy, agreed before the coronavirus, had showed the District was well placed to cope with an economic contraction, but the impact of Covid-19 on every economic sector could not have been predicted. Officers had distributed the grants quickly. This was a busy period with lots of business meetings especially with business leaders to identify areas where improvements could be made, and attended by the Cabinet Portfolio Holders, Councillors N Bedford and J Philip. Officers had dealt with over 100 callers and signposted many businesses to the immediate grants and other grants.

The Council had met with the Federation of Small Businesses, Town Centre Partnerships and tourism attractions to ensure the Council was reaching out as efficiently as possible, and covered plans on reopening to see where support would be needed. Officers had been conducting research into the Council's handling of the crisis in relation to what was happening on a national basis and was looking at furloughed jobs and levels of unemployment. Officers were monitoring car park usage and footfall levels as well as checking to see if any Council shop leases were being handed back. The Economic Development Team had been preparing and updating its responsibilities in connection to the Council's recovery plan. This included initiatives it wanted to bring to Cabinet to help in the District's recovery, which included hospitality and visitor support, and to kickstart apprenticeships and help unemployment levels. The Government Chancellor made a range of announcements yesterday which officers were evaluating.

On the digital platform front, the Council had managed to bring in some 20 million of investment on the digital infrastructure, which would enable 99 per cent connectivity across the District by the end of next year so that GP surgeries could benefit from ultrafast broadband. The Council received information on the availability of Government grants and would be submitting a bid for a new platform for social exclusion especially digital exclusion. It would also ensure that the Council was best placed to receive its fair share of any future grants from Government, the Department of Works and Pensions and Essex County Council to use for the benefit of the District.

Councillor R Bassett remarked that gyms would be opening up towards the end of July which would restart the leisure industry sector.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Business support grant update be noted;

- (2) That the Covid-19 Safer Spaces initiative be noted; and
- (3) That the General economic measures and support, and local economic business recovery be noted.

## 8. NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD MASTERPLAN

The Planning Services Director, N Richardson, reported that in the emerging Local Plan there was a requirement for a masterplan for North Weald Airfield (NWA) with new employment opportunities. The appointed consultants, Turner and Townsend and RPS Group, had been instructed to undertake survey work, and a viability report was being prepared. The masterplan was for non-residential use. As a designated employment area, this would create new jobs as part of the Council's Covid-19 recovery plan in the long term. There was to be an initial contingency workshop for Cabinet members by the end of July for the masterplan site options. The Planning Team needed to get involved with the project proposals and planners had advised on a planning performance agreement template. At various stages as the masterplan progressed, the proposals would go through the Quality Review Panel. Thus, the masterplan would be in place for the site before the submission of planning applications, and all the NWA development proposals must be in accordance with the masterplan.

Councillor R Bassett asked if there was the possibility of tidying up and moving some of the business premises on the site as there locations were spread out across NWA. The Planning Services Director replied that Turner and Townsend and RPS would be bringing options forward, especially to the east of the runway where most of the development opportunities were to be sited. Councillor Bassett continued that some of the people looking after the aircraft there wanted to create a mini aircraft heritage site. The Service Director replied if this created employment opportunities then this could give it potential. Councillor Bassett asked about the possible Government use of the site by the HMRC in connection with Brexit. The Service Director replied that this could be the case as the special development order would finish at the end of December 2020, but there was no further information available at present. Councillor S Heap asked if the Council was paid, to which the Chief Operating Officer replied that the Council had received a reasonable rental of some £200,000 and a one-off payment of £500,000, £50,000 of which had been paid to North Weald Parish Council. Councillor Heap asked if there would be a park and ride scheme at NWA. The Service Director replied this concerned a separate planning application but was not part of the emerging Local Plan. Members were advised not to converse with the developers directly but to go through Planning.

### **RESOLVED:**

That progress of the North Weald Airfield Masterplan be noted.

## 9. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LOCAL PLAN: UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The Interim Assistant Director (Planning Policy & Implementation) introduced the regular quarterly report that would be going to Cabinet on 20 July 2020. Following the recent Executive Briefing, the final report included a few updates, particularly to the spreadsheets. Members received regular updates on the strategic masterplans, concept frameworks, other sites within the emerging Local Plan and the schemes that would be going before the Quality Review Panels. A workshop on the draft Green Infrastructure Plan had been held last week and the consultation would end on 16 July 2020. The final Green Infrastructure Plan would go to Cabinet in October

2020 for approval. Officers continued to progress work on the Main Modifications (MMs). The third tranche of Main Modifications (MMs) had been submitted to the Inspector in early June 2020. As completion of the MMs was scheduled for the end of September, the Implementation Team expected to go out to consultation on the MMs in October 2020.

Cllr R Bassett referred to site LOU.R9 (Epping Forest College, Borders Lane, Loughton) and remarked that this land had previously been owned by the College, but since sold to a developer who was submitting this application for 139 residential units.

Councillor S Heap said he was keeping an open mind so as not to fetter his discretion, but from the way some of the applications were presented, such as the Dowding Way, it looked as if the Council wanted this rather than for it to be decided. The Interim Assistant Director replied that all current applications were on this list. The spreadsheets in the report just provided an update and information for members on what was coming forward for sites of more than six dwellings or for a certain quantum of floor space. The Implementation Team dealt with the strategic sites and the strategic implementation sites.

Councillor C McCredie thanked the Interim Assistant Director but had concerns on how current the report was and how relevant the figures in the report were. For the South Epping site, the Inspector wanted numbers reduced. For the Old Laundry site, Epping, currently undergoing a virtual public hearing, so the Council might lose most of those dwellings as it was up to the Inspector. On 1 Buttercross Lane, this had come before the Council twice for six apartments, but the latest application was for a house and three apartments so less than was planned for. On Broadbanks, the application for nine dwellings was not acceptable to Epping Town Council and there were other applications that recommended refusal. The Duke of Wellington PH had been recommended for refusal. Therefore, there was concern that all these potential developments as part of the Local Plan might not happen. The Interim Assistant Director replied that the full list included allocated and unallocated sites. Some of the sites you mentioned were not allocated with the Local Plan, but anyone could submit a planning application. The Council and the South Epping site promoter were in discussions on the number of units, but this was subject to the Inspector's decision. Epping Laundry site was currently awaiting the Inspector's decision.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That progress of Masterplans and Concept Frameworks, including the use of Planning Performance Agreements and the progress of other proposals at preapplication and application stage be noted.

### **10. CLIMATE CHANGE**

#### **(a) Climate Change and Sustainable Travel**

The Interim Assistant Director (Planning Policy and Implementation) reported that recruitment to both posts had been achieved. The Travel Officer had started on 1 June while the Climate Change Officer would take up this position in September 2020. There was a lot of work to be undertaken around the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), air quality issues including the draft Mitigation Strategy, as well as building on the post-Covid-19 recovery and safer spaces project.



The Chief Operating Officer, N Dawe, continued that next month the proposal would be developed in more detail and its status would switch from strategy to task.

Councillor A Heap asked about sustainable travel and buses to Epping for the Latton Priory Local Plan site as this would be required. The Interim Assistant Director replied that work had been commissioned on bus provision from Harlow and Epping. Cycling and walking would promote sustainable travel but was not an option for aged people.

#### **(b) Update on Environmental Enhancements and Tree Planting Initiatives**

The Service Director (Commercial and Regulatory) / (Contracts and Technical Services), Q Durrani, explained that this report had been delayed when the last Select Committee meeting on 24 March 2020 had been cancelled because of the Covid-19 lockdown. The report listed the types of work that the Council's Countrycare Team was involved with. This covered over 3,600 Veteran Trees (trees over 300 years old), plus over 1,200 'notable' trees that weren't old enough to be classed as veteran yet. The Council also managed around 15,000 public realm trees on open spaces and the public highway, but this did not include woodland. A further 119 semi-mature trees had been planted in safe locations in Chigwell Row and Epping. Tree planting was being organised for the Loughton Recreation area and the Thornwood Nature Reserve this financial year.

The Green Infrastructure Strategy would help to plan and facilitate the integration and expansion of tree planting in the District. Volunteers did a lot of work as did Tree Wardens, who monitored the health of trees. The Essex Forest Project to plant 375,000 trees by 2025 including flood alleviation tree planting schemes was likely to form part of this strategy, as well as the 'Green Arc'. This was an initiative where London met the countryside (from Thames Chase through to the Lee Valley area) with the aim to plant a million trees. There would also be more tree planting opportunities in the Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANG) being delivered alongside the proposed growth in the District.

Cllr R Bassett was impressed by the number of veteran trees that had survived the hurricane of 1987. He asked if the Council was working with Lee Valley Regional Park and Roding Valley Nature Reserve to bid for some of these trees? The Service Director replied that the Countrycare Team had a close working relationship with officers at the Lee Valley Regional Park and had bid for a £50,000 grant to plant trees. Tree-planting needed to be carefully planned. Integrated green sites would be developed for the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town sites.

Councillor C McCredie praised these initiatives and endorsed the work of the District's tree wardens.

Councillor S Murray said he lived locally to the nature reserve and Roding Valley Recreation Ground. The latter was managed by Loughton Town Council and this Council's Grounds Maintenance Team did a very good job. It was used by hundreds of people during the coronavirus crisis. The nature reserve and the Council had a very good partnership. Tree planting had been carried out on the River Roding to reduce erosion. Also, the City of London Corporation (CLC), which looked after Epping Forest, was an important SSSI site because of the huge number of veteran trees.

Councillor J Jennings supported the excellent schemes. The Councillor had planted trees in her own garden, but it also had two ancient trees and natural hawthorn

hedges. The Campaign to Protect Rural England supported the use of hedges to catch carbon dioxide emissions, but many hedges had been lost over time. Could hedges be included in some of the environmental enhancement schemes? The Service Director would take this feedback to the Countrycare Team.

Councillor S Heap remarked that this was a good report and that he lived near Lords Bushes where there were some 500 trees in a 50-hectare area. The CLC had been doing a lot of planting. He supported the planting of copses to enhance insect colonies and hoped the Council would fund such schemes.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the progress in recruitment and ongoing work on climate change and sustainable travel be noted;
- (2) That the baseline data on Council managed green infrastructure and the potential for future environmental enhancement and tree planting be noted; and
- (3) That opportunities for future tree planting initiatives be explored through the Green Infrastructure Strategy that is in preparation.

**11. SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW**

The Service Manager (Housing Needs and Older People's Services), J Gould, reported that this review provided a progress report on the Council's sheltered housing. Ark had been commissioned to undertake a review of the Council's 12 sheltered housing schemes. As life expectancy increased, the demographic of an ageing population changed in relation to the needs for health, social care and housing. By building a comprehensive picture of performance and sustainability, as well as taking into consideration the likely future demand for accommodation, the review achieved a clear direction for accommodation to make best use of the stock to meet residents' needs.

Ratings of the 12 schemes had resulted in:

- green: 6 – for recommendations to continue use but explore minor remodelling to make better use of guest rooms, second lounges and disused warden accommodation;
- amber: 4 – for recommendations to continue use as sheltered accommodation but try to improve quality, desirability and overall performance; and
- amber/red: 2 – for recommendations to continue use as sheltered accommodation in the short term but with more targeted improvements to better meet the needs of the District's ageing population.

Councillor R Bassett commented that the Council had 463 sheltered housing accommodation units but with the requirement to keep older people in their own homes, how many did the Council need to keep up with demand? The Service Manager replied that the District's population of over 65s was expected to increase by 3% in the next decade to around 30,000 (22.5% of the District's total population) and worked with Essex County Council (ECC) to help people to live independently. Much of the stock was pre-1970 so improvements were required as the residents'

needs changed, but great strides were being achieved for older people within the Housing and Property Directorate.

Councillor R Brookes commented that there was a demand for 2-bed accommodation for older people, if couples did not sleep together or as in one case for two sisters, or sometimes for a carer to stay the night, and was surprised this had not come up in the survey. There was also a tremendous demand for housing for the under 35s. The Service Manager replied that there was a need for 2-beds. Housing officers were getting to know current tenants better. Officers were incentivising tenants under occupying properties to move to more appropriate accommodation. The remodelling of some stock with retractable partitions in larger bedrooms would help focus on the needs of the residents. There were increasing amounts of young homeless people who were placed in bedsits. However, by having creative housing solutions for younger people, this would keep the flow going and help maximise stock.

Councillor J Jennings commented that mixed aged groups could be mutually beneficial. How many sheltered housing units were empty, and how many did not have good broadband? The Service Manager replied that she did not have the figure to hand and there were voids in the housing stock, but the coronavirus had resulted in more of this age group shielding. Housing was focussing on more connectivity as a result of the Covid-19 crisis where people were having to work remotely, and Housing was trying to get communal broadband into the housing schemes as they did not have Wi-fi but was not aware of any specific issues.

Councillor J McIvor commented on the good report and that in the affordability section the Council should be proud of being significantly below the benchmark of 35% affordability. The Councillor commented that under resident profile, 9% of older residents were in full or part-time employment. Was there any scope to encourage residents to move to perhaps be nearer their work, or be less isolated, or be with people of a similar age and the benefits of this? Were the two connected and could this help free up stock that could perhaps be put to better use? The Service Manager replied that once Housing officers knew the number of people under occupying this would help. It was not specific to older people but anyone under occupying. A range of opportunities could be offered to residents and work was underway this year on better use of Housing stock and greater creativity would help.

Councillor S Murray asked if the Council still had financial incentives on people downsizing, and the funding of an officer to help elderly people through the moving experience? The Service Manager replied yes, the Council did have an incentive programme around downsizing and there was a dedicated officer in the Older People's Housing Team to help support residents moving.

Councillor H Whitbread (Portfolio Holder Housing and Communities) said this was a really important piece of work and both Service Managers, J Gould and D Fenton, had a 21st century approach to housing.

Councillor J H Whitehouse asked if access to the Housing Allocation Officer was just for housing tenants? The Service Manager replied the officer based in the Older People's Housing Team would support and advise anyone applying for or moving into older people's accommodation. Councillor J H Whitehouse remarked that sheltered housing helped to prevent and/or delay older people moving into residential care and many might have carers coming in several times a day. When she had been a County Councillor there was a place in Brentwood that had combined all the residents care services and provided 2 or 3 full time carers on-site all the time. It had

also been flexible if residents returned from hospital. Now there were a lot of independent care agencies, but this had provided a much better standard of care. The Service Manager replied that local based care could be tailored to residents' needs. Social care came under the provision of ECC, but she would contact ECC and see what scope there was on this.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the key findings from the Sheltered Housing Review summarised in this report be noted;
- (2) That the five recommendations below arising from the review be approved:
  - (i) To take forward proposals for remodelling and redevelopment;
  - (ii) To work with residents (including prospective residents) to develop forward looking and sustainable standards that improve the quality, suitability and desirability of schemes;
  - (iii) To improve the approach to asset management;
  - (iv) To improve demand for sheltered housing;
  - (v) To improve the financial performance of schemes;
- (3) That detailed feasibility studies on any schemes receiving a red rating through the process of review be agreed to be undertaken; and
- (4) That the proposal of any resulting projects plan with timescales and resident consultation programmes be brought back to committee for agreement prior to commencement be approved.

**12. GROUP COMPANY STRUCTURE - EPPING TOWN CENTRE SITES**

On behalf of the Strategic Director, the Service Manager (Housing Needs and Older People's Services) reported that the interim Qualis Board and the group of companies had been established. Qualis Commercial was involved with the development of Council owned land. In April 2020, Cabinet approved the transfer of the land ownership into Qualis Commercial for the five Epping Town sites and the Roundhills site. Qualis Management expected the delivery of the Council's repairs service, and work on the Epping Town Council sites to go live in September 2020. Qualis Commercial and the Design Team were working to develop the strategic options for the five Epping Town sites – St John's Road, Bakers Lane and Cottis Lane car parks, land by the Civic Offices and Epping Sports Centre. The Planning performance agreement that set out the approach through the pre-planning stages up to the submission of a full planning application had been agreed. To ensure stakeholder engagement throughout the planning process, a detailed communications plan would be established, to include consultation through the Commonplace online community platform. A detailed appraisal process would be followed to assess the suitability of each site to achieve a policy compliant scheme. The team was currently in the first stage of design and consultation. On the Roundhills site, stage 1 was due for completion in July, the architects had been appointed and planning submission should be achieved by the end of the summer.

Cllr R Bassett said that Councillor H Kauffman was on the interim Board and did he want to comment? Councillor Kauffman advised that there would be a large amount of work undertaken along with feasibility studies, dialogue with planners and was looking forward to the consultations.

Councillor R Brookes asked what was planned for the St John's Road site on the proposed leisure centre as she had received many enquiries about this? When would she be able to advise them further and how would they respond to the company handling the requests? The Service Manager replied that she would ask the Strategic Director to reply to this question after the meeting.

Councillor A Heap commented that in respect of the planning performance agreements, it seemed that the Council was approving the Council's progress. On artistic qualities of place making and conservation, he was not convinced that anything was particularly artistically viable, and who would be in control of this? Qualis should not just concentrate on the commercial aspects but could have an energy company and by putting solar panels on buildings, the Council should be able to benefit from this renewable energy revenue stream that could help lower Council Tax, for instance. He would submit a proposal on this in due course.

Councillor J M Whitehouse remarked that regarding the Commonplace consultation, there was not much information on the proposals being shared with the public, yet there had been many reports to Cabinet, and this should be explicit in consultations. Also, who was on the interim Board and when would the transfer to the full, permanent Board happen? Also, how much capital loan had Qualis used thus far?

The Strategic Director responded after the meeting that at present the Commonplace site was unable to post any specific proposals until they had been through Qualis Board and Committee. This initial consultation with Commonplace was to find out what was important to those living and working in the District by using sentiment questions about the different sites. This information would then be considered and used to progress draft proposals, which would be added to the site as soon as possible. The site was a way to gain as much engagement and feedback as early on as possible.

Cllr Kauffman replied that he was a non-executive director, as were Councillors N Avey and J Philip. The transfer to the permanent Board should take place between September and October this year. Mr P ffolkes Davis was the Chairman, and members on the interim board were very knowledgeable and experienced. Mr C Ives was the Development Director and was also very experienced. The planning performance agreement was a very useful tool. He supported its use because Council officers were the best people to know and advise on sustainability, design and use, while Qualis, as a developer, was there to progress the projects forward. This combination was right to ensure good design and uses, and the planning performance agreement allowed for checks and balances to be in place. In terms of green initiatives, Qualis was going for highly sustainable developments and there would be more information coming out, but Qualis had to make sure that these schemes were financially viable and were appropriate for the development sites. We were going through a very difficult commercial time at the moment, the world was changing and we needed to be able to react to that, not produce a scheme that might already be out of date because of the circumstances that we would be delivering it.

The Chief Operating Officer, N Dawe, said that £1.5 million had been drawn from the capital to date and effectively after that, a full report on the first two quarters of operation would be produced for the interim Qualis Board in late July and be reported to Cabinet soon after.

Councillor A Heap commented that going forward he thought the Qualis Board should be enlarged and open to the Greens, especially on the future of the Green

Policy, and the Liberal Democrats would also have something to offer. Therefore, there would be wider participation.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the current progress with the Group Company set up be noted;
- (2) That progress of the five Epping Town Centre sites be noted; and
- (3) That progress of the Roundhills sites be noted.

**13. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was noted that future meetings of the Select Committee would be held at 7.00pm on the following dates:

- 29 September 2020;
- 12 January 2021; and
- 29 March 2021