

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee:	Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee	Date:	Monday, 20 June 2022
Place:	Council Chamber - Civic Offices	Time:	7.00 - 7.31 pm
Members Present:	Councillors H Whitbread (Chairman), N Bedford, A Patel and J Philip		
Members Present (Virtually):	None		
Other Councillors:	Councillors L Burrows and R Morgan		
Other Councillors (Virtual):	Councillors R Brookes, S Heap and D Wixley		
Apologies:	Councillor N Avey		
Officers Present:	J Leither (Democratic Services Officer) and N Cole (Corporate Communications Officer)		
Officers Present (Virtually):	R Hoyte (Service Manager - Housing Development) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)		

1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman 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.

2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Cabinet Committee noted that there were no substitute members present at the meeting.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

4. MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee held on the 08 March 2022 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

5. COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRESS REPORT - PHASE 4-5

Rochelle Hoyte, Service Manager, Housing Development presented a report to the Cabinet Committee and recommended that the Council House Building Progress Report - Phases 4 to 5 be noted. She advised that the report set out the progress that had been made across Phases 4 to 5 of the Council House Building Programme and that they were either completed, on-site or were currently being procured.

She reported an update to the report, on the 8 June 2022 the Chequers Road (B) site in Loughton went before the Area Plans South Sub-Committee and planning permission was refused this would now go to the District Development Management Committee on the 29 June 2022 and the outcome would be reported at the next meeting.

Councillor H Whitbread advised that the Pick Hill site in Waltham Abbey was to be named after Don Spinks, who was a former Chairman of Council and so was his wife Liz Webster. The Council were looking to arrange an opening ceremony for that development and details would be known soon.

Councillor J Philip referred to page 11 of the agenda under the heading Executive Summary, where it stated 'delays to the substation works stating and is due to have a full site present from August 2022 June 2022'. He asked for clarification on the date.

R Hoyte advised that it was August 2022.

The Chairman, Councillor H Whitbread stated that there were a number of handovers due this year and in 2023 and asked how many Council Houses had been completed since the programme had first started.

R Hoyte advised that there was only Bushfields, Loughton and Pick Hill, Waltham Abbey to be handed over as everything else had now been handed over in Phase 4. She stated that she did not have the information to hand but would be able to get the number of completed units since the programme first started and would distribute that information to the Cabinet Committee.

She also advised that there were some further units to be handed over in 2023, delivered by one of the Council's partners.

Councillor H Whitbread asked if there were any updates to the scheme at St John's Church, Epping.

R Hoyte advised that there had been no formal updates given to her regarding St John's but she knew Heritage England had a review of the scheme and were happy with the changes that had been made. She advised that she would get the latest information and would update the Chairman.

Councillor N Bedford stated that now that the units were being completed and handed over have there been any increased costings, as supplies had been in short demand, what impact to the budget had there been from estimated costs to the final costs.

R Hoyte advised that overall there was approximately a 15% increase in costs as the sites were pre-covid and had been before her time and the new programme. The increased costs have been agreed before implementation and have only been agreed where necessary, some of the costs have been supported by the contingencies in place but there have been a couple of schemes where the

contingencies were not enough so available S106 funds had been used to cover those costs.

Councillor A Patel asked if in the future when progress report came to the Cabinet Committee it would be useful to have dates attached to the scheme notes so that the progress can be tracked as and when they schemes are moved along.

Councillor H Whitbread agreed with Councillor Patel and stated that there should be a running tally with progress points next to each scheme maybe as a summary at the beginning of the report so that more of an idea of what's been completed, what's online and if the scheme was on schedule or if there were any delays. She asked if this could be included in the next progress report and also if it could be backdated so that there was an idea of what had been delivered.

R Hoyte advised that she had taken the comments on board and would add this information into the next progress report.

Councillor D Wixley stated that it would be helpful if Councillors knew when developments in their wards had been completed. He referred to a development in his ward which had been named Young Close and residents had already moved into. He asked how the name Young Close had been arrived at as in Debden there was an historical connection regarding the naming of roads which related to the names of individuals who were involved in saving Epping Forest.

The Chairman advised that the naming of developments and roads was an oversight which got lost during the pandemic but this had now been rectified and that she had recently named one site in Waltham Abbey after Don Spinks a former Chairman of Council and also looking to name another Waltham Abbey site after another former Councillor. If any sites came up for naming in any other divisions the Chairman advised that she would liaise with the ward councillors before any naming took place.

R Hoyte advised that she had implemented an internal list for sites that are completed and she would now populate this by email for Councillors across the district. She advised that the naming of Young Close predated her and as far as she was aware there was no historical connection and she did not know why that name was picked. Going forward names were now being discussed with the Chairman who would then approach the ward councillors to discuss any historical connections and naming of sites.

Councillor S Heap advised that he would like to address the overspend on all of these projects which were enormous, for example in Buckhurst Hill, Hornbeam A site the overspend was around £148,000 and Ladyfields in Loughton was over £2million. He stated that Qualis also charged 15% admin fee and an 8% supervisory fee and was that also included in these costings.

The Chairman advised that the HRA business plan did make provision for where there might be an increase in costs and tries to keep the Council on track as much as possible, there were also problems with contamination and that sites had to be cleared before works could be started and rising costs in the materials.

Councillor J Philip stated that this had been covered several times in previous meetings of this Cabinet Committee and it had also been previously advised that for Phase 5 and sites going forward there was a new estimating tool that would allow the Council to be more accurate in the costings.

R Hoyte stated that as discussed in previous meetings what had already been done in Phases 1-4 could not be undone but from Phase 5 onwards we would now be able to get a more accurate costing. There were also problems, not only with contamination, but also with foundations and an engineer that wasn't making the best decisions in terms of how matters were resolved which led to other decisions having to be made to rectify the problems. Phase 4 and the problems resulting from it have affected the programme in terms of cost but moving forward from Phase 5 onwards the Council will be using the correct tools that are available and are more aware of the problems that have been encountered within the previous phases.

Councillor R Brookes stated that it was very useful to have the statistics regarding the increased costs and asked if the Council were financing this programme from the Right to Buy sales and loans.

R Hoyte advised that this was correct.

Councillor S Heap asked if more details could be provided at the time when things went wrong so that Councillors knew exactly what was going wrong at the time and could someone answer his question regarding the fees paid to Qualis.

R Hoyte advised that she had previously shared increased costs issues in previous Cabinet Committee meetings and stated that the programme that she was working on did not involve Qualis in any way, the costing she had given was based on the BCIS and had nothing to do with Qualis.

The Chairman advised that extensive discussions had taken place at the Cabinet Committee meetings previously and some of the schemes discussed at this meeting have been discussed previously. She also stated that his question regarding Qualis had not been ignored but you cannot be heard very clearly from your car.

Councillor N Bedford stated that it wasn't a case of what had gone wrong it was more of an overspend which had been explained by the Officer on several occasions at the Cabinet Committee meetings. There have been some issues with contamination and cleaning up the sites but we must remember that these were garage sites. Therefore I believe it's not what has gone wrong it's explaining the overspend to which has been discussed and explained in detail.

Councillor D Wixley referred to page 29 of the agenda, Chester Road, Loughton where it stated in the comments column what was meant by 'parking signs, no contingency left. Then further down the page Kirby Close (Loughton) 'general variations including some omissions'.

R Hoyte explained that there was no contingency left to put up parking signs therefore the cost had to be added on, the signs would be for areas that have issues with parking and trying to preserve the parking for the residents living in those properties signs have been added underneath the road names. These signs would not have been included in the initial contract and therefore were extra costs that would have to be added on. General variations meant that each month if there were any variations over and above what was initially agreed they are looked at by the Council's surveyor who would advise if the costs were reasonable and then she needed to look over the extra costs and agree whether it should be accepted or not.

Decision:

That the contents of this Progress Report on Phases 4 to 5 of the Council House Building Programme be noted and presented to the Cabinet in line with the Terms of Reference of the Council House Building Cabinet Committee.

Reason for Decision:

Set out in its Terms of Reference, the Council House Building Cabinet Committee was to monitor and report to the Council, on an annual basis progress and expenditure concerning the Council House Building Programme. This report sets out the progress made since last reported.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

There were no other options for action.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor D Wixley referred to minutes on page 9 of the agenda and advised that at the last meeting he had raised an issue concerning a resident of Castell Road, Loughton where the resident wanted to speak to an officer and had left a message on the 25 February. Councillor Wixley stated that after the meeting on the 8 March 2022 he had passed over the residents details to the Officer but the resident had still not been contacted by anyone from the Council.

The Chairman advised that this matter should now be taken off line and Councillor Wixley should discuss this with the Service Manager after the meeting.

Councillor R Morgan asked if there was a progress report of the garage site at the Colvers in Matching Green. He stated that in the past there were two houses going to be built on that site which were refused at committee due to the loss of parking and it was stated at that time that another scheme would be looked at to see if the parking could be increased.

R Hoyte advised that she would look into it as it was not a site that she was familiar with so she would have to look at the details on the system and would be able to provide an update.

Councillor R Brookes stated that there had been scaffolding on one of the properties in Burton Road, Debden for approximately 7 months and wondered what the problem was.

R Hoyte advised that there was a problem with the roof and the contractors put the scaffolding up to investigate the problem and they were now waiting for the roofing tiles to be delivered to replace the roof. It was easier to leave the scaffolding up then take it down and this was at no cost to the Council the contractor would bear the cost of the scaffolding. She further added that the property was empty the residents had been moved out until the works had been completed. She further added that no monies would be lost as this would be claimed back from the contractor.

Councillor R Brookes asked if all of the monies had been paid to the contractor or did the Council hold any back for snagging.

R Hoyte advised that a retention was held back and would not be paid out to the contractors until we are satisfied that the works within the whole development had been completed to a satisfactory standard.

The Chairman asked if a report on this property could be sent to her and the Ward Councillors as soon as possible.

7. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

CHAIRMAN