

## EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Committee:** Local Plan Cabinet Committee      **Date:** 18 February 2013

**Place:** Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping      **Time:** 6.00 - 6.55 pm

**Members Present:** C Whitbread (Chairman), W Breare-Hall, Mrs A Grigg and D Stallan

**Other Councillors:** Ms H Kane, J Knapman, Mrs L Wagland, G Waller, A Watts, Mrs E Webster and D Wixley

**Apologies:** R Bassett

**Officers Present:** G Chipp (Chief Executive), K Polyzoides (Assistant Director (Policy & Conservation)), I White (Forward Planning Manager), M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

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### 23. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

### 24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

In the absence of the Chairman, who had tendered his apologies for the meeting, the Cabinet Committee agreed that the Leader of the Council would chair this meeting.

### 25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

### 26. MINUTES

**Resolved:**

(1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2012 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 27. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Cabinet Committee noted its terms of reference, as amended by the Leader of the Council.

**28. PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISIONS AGREED SINCE THE LAST MEETING**

The Cabinet Committee noted that the following Portfolio Holder decisions in relation to the Local Plan had been agreed since the last meeting on 26 November 2012:

- (i) PLA-012 Sustainability Appraisal & Habitats Regulation Assessment – Waiving of Contract Standing Orders; and
- (ii) PLA-013 Annual Monitoring Report 2011/12.

**29. LOCAL PLAN - PROGRESS & BUDGET UPDATE**

The Forward Planning Manager presented a report on current progress with the Local Plan and an update on the Local Plan budget.

The Forward Planning Manager reported that progress on the Local Plan had accelerated in recent months, with the 'Community Choices: Issues & Options' consultation period being held between July and October 2012. This had resulted in 4,080 responses being received on behalf of 6,331 people. Detailed analysis was now being performed by the Forward Planning team. Further evidence base work was required around population figures, economic development, flood risk and transport. Further detailed investigation of some matters might also be required as the analysis of consultation responses progresses. It was currently envisaged that the 'Preferred Options' consultation would commence in the Autumn of 2013.

The Forward Planning Manager informed the Cabinet Committee that, as of 30 January 2013, £262,930 had been spent from existing budgets on the preparation of the Local Plan. Identified expenditure was broadly within estimated budgets, and unforeseen amounts could be absorbed into the existing District Development Fund (DDF) budget at this stage. Further review of the overall budget was likely to be required in future. The 'Community Choices: Issues & Options' consultation had cost £54,000. The Local Plan budget was in a healthy position at the moment but some extra expenditure was expected in the future; the Cabinet Committee advised the Officers that any request for supplementary finance should be made as early as possible to ensure that it was approved by the Cabinet and Council in good time.

The Forward Planning Manager confirmed that population and household projections for the District commissioned by the Essex Planning Officers Association would not be available until March, and therefore would not form part of the scheduled Member Local Plan workshops. However, it was intended to hold a fourth workshop when the figures had been released. The population figures to be released in March 2013 would be the most accurate and would be used for the Local Plan when they were made available. This would be phase 4 of the process referred to in the report and would incorporate the recent census figures.

The Assistant Director of Planning & Economic Development (Policy & Conservation) informed the Cabinet Committee that the Communications Strategy was being updated to learn the lessons from the previous consultation. This had included the performance of the distribution company used to circulate the leaflets advertising the consultation. As had been reported at the previous meeting, further testing of the on-line response system would be undertaken before the 'Preferred Options' consultation. The Chief Executive added that a whole range of different mechanisms were being investigated for advertising the 'Preferred Options' consultation, including better use of the Town and Parish Councils within the District. It was suggested by the Members present that a consistent letter should be sent to each resident within

the district to advertise the next round of consultation, and the underlying assumptions used for each of the models should be published for Member and public information. The Cabinet Committee was informed that approximately 1,500 responses had been received for the Community Visioning exercise.

The Assistant Director stated that regular monitoring reports on the Local Plan were submitted to the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel, at least twice a year. The Cabinet Committee was concerned about receiving update reports every six months, and agreed that future updates should be provided every three months instead. It was also requested that the documents from the Member Workshops should be made available to all Members. The Forward Planning Manager confirmed that regular meetings were held with Forward Planning Officers from Harlow to discuss the results of the various Evidence Base studies.

**Decision:**

- (1) That progress on the Local Plan be noted;
- (2) That the expenditure on preparing the Local Plan to date in 2012/13 and the estimates for further expenditure over the coming months be noted; and
- (3) That a progress and budget update report on the Local Plan be submitted to the Cabinet Committee every quarter for consideration in the future.

**Reasons for Decision:**

To update the Cabinet Committee on the current situation.

**Other Options Considered and Rejected:**

None.

**30. DRAFT STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND DRAFT COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

The Assistant Director of Planning & Economic Development (Policy & Conservation) presented a report on the draft Statement of Community Involvement and the draft Communications Strategy.

The Assistant Director reminded the Cabinet Committee that the Statement of Community Involvement represented the minimum that the Council would do in engaging with the community on matters of concern to the Local Plan, and a consultation on the draft version of the Statement of Community Involvement had been undertaken in the summer and autumn of 2012. The responses gave rise to considerable valuable feedback for the service which could now be implemented for forthcoming consultations. Consequently, a number of changes to the text of the Statement of Community Involvement had been made to make it clearer and more up to date, and address a number of the concerns raised.

The Assistant Director stated that, in addition, there were a range of actions proposed for inclusion in the draft Communications Strategy to strengthen the transparency of communication on the Local Plan and improve on the recent experience regarding planning policy consultation. It was intended that the Local Plan Communications Strategy would provide more detail as to how the Council would engage with all its stakeholders and would provide a detailed methodology. However,

planning consultations always contained controversial matters and the overall aim could only be to ensure that messages were clearly and consistently communicated, and that processes were fair and transparent.

The Assistant Director added that some additional items had been identified for further study and, if considered feasible, could be included in time for the next major planning policy consultation, namely the 'Preferred Options' consultation. The draft Statement of Community Involvement and draft Communications Strategy, if agreed by the Local Plan Cabinet Committee, would then be submitted to the Council at its meeting in April 2013 for formal adoption.

Some of the other Members present opined that the Council would want as many responses as possible from the public for the 'Preferred Options' consultation, to generate a sound evidence base for the Local Plan. It was therefore suggested that plain English should be used for the supporting documents to make them more comprehensible to the public. The Chief Executive stated that the production of "Idiots Guides" for each document was being considered and the Leader of the Council confirmed that the Council would engage plain English consultants if necessary. It was also suggested that telephone and email contact information for the Parish and Town Council Clerks could also be provided within the advertising literature sent out by the District Council. The Assistant Director reassured the Meeting that the additional items identified for further study would be submitted for Member approval before being included in a future revised Statement of Community Involvement.

**Decision:**

- (1) That the responses made to the Statement of Community Involvement consultation be noted;
- (2) That the proposed modifications to the draft Statement of Community Involvement, which were partly as a response to the consultations and to update the document, be approved;
- (3) That the actions proposed for inclusion in the Council's draft Local Plan Communications Strategy be approved;
- (4) That the further items to be explored for inclusion in the Council's Local Plan Communications Strategy be noted; and
- (5) That the draft Statement of Community Involvement, incorporating the revised Local Plan Communications Strategy, be recommended to the Council for approval, on the understanding it represented the minimum level of actions the Council would take to encourage community involvement in the Local Plan process.

**Reasons for Decision:**

The Council was required to have an up to date Statement of Community Involvement which had been consulted upon. Following the consultation period, some revisions had been recommended, prior to the adoption of the Statement.

**Other Options Considered and Rejected:**

The Council could not adopt the statement and only undertake the minimum engagement required by legislation, however the Council would not then be

transparent about the way it intended to engage with the public on the Local Plan and in determining planning applications for development.

**31. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Cabinet Committee noted that there was no other business for consideration at the meeting.

**CHAIRMAN**