

Report to Local Councils Liaison Committee

Date of meeting: 22 March 2012

Portfolio: Planning & ICT

Subject: EFDC Local Plan: Briefing- March 2012

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To update on progress of the Council's Local Plan.

Report:

National Planning Policy Framework

1. As previously reported to Local Council Liaison there have been significant changes to the Planning system, namely the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework and subsequent changes to the Planning Regulations outlining how the new Local Plans should be delivered.

2. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will replace all but one of the current Planning Policy Statements (PPS), all of the current Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPG), and a small number of circulars, resulting in a much shorter single document. The overall intentions are to:

- (a) Emphasise the primacy of the Local Plan;
- (b) Consolidate and streamline national planning policy to reduce bureaucracy;
- (c) Promote sustainable economic growth while retaining important environmental and social objectives;
- (d) Empower local communities to do things their way instead of excessive control from Central Government; and
- (e) Make the system more "user friendly" and accessible, so that it is easier for members of the public to have a meaningful say in planning decisions.

3. The draft NPPF introduced the "presumption in favour of sustainable development" but it:

- did not define "sustainable development", instead indicating that economic, social and environmental issues are "key sustainable development principles";
- was equally unclear about the relative weighting of the new presumption against the retained national guidance on the protection of the Green Belt;
- advised that (a) plans should be "driven by a search for opportunities to deliver sustainable development, rather than erecting barriers to suppress or prevent it"; and (b) where plans are silent or indeterminate on issues, the presumption in favour of sustainable development will apply

4. In responding to the consultation on the draft NPPF, the Council challenged these (amongst many other) issues and proposed wording to be included in the final version of the NPPF which would address the potential conflict between the presumption and the need to

protect the Green Belt: "When considering a development proposal in the Green Belt which is likely to have a significant effect on any of the five purposes of including land in Green Belts, a planning authority may assume that such a proposed development would not be sustainable under the terms of the presumption in favour of sustainable development, unless it is satisfied that very special local circumstances apply."

5. The National Planning Policy Framework is due to be published sometime between March and April 2012. The same is anticipated for the amended Planning Regulations relating to the preparation of Local Plans, now that local authorities are given the option to prepare a single volume document, which is what this Council has decided to do.

6. There will be a transitional period after publication of the NPPF, during which local authorities will be expected to adopt new Local Plans. Officers believe that this may be 18 months although this has not been made official and may be shorter.

Strategic Land Availability Assessment

7. The Council has appointed consultants to work on the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA), following the consultation on methodology carried out late last year. Nathaniel Lichfield Partners (NLP) has been issued with call for sites responses and EFDC's land terrier information. The consultants have also been asked to review land on the periphery of the existing settlements. The SLAA will help to identify potential sites for housing, employment and retail uses over the Local Plan period (to 2031), and this information will be fed into the Issues and Options document for consultation starting in July 2012.

8. Member briefings on the SLAA are being held in the Council Chamber on the 30th of March. There will be an am and pm session and invites were sent out the w/b 12/3. The consultants will be presenting their methodology and findings and it will be an opportunity for local Councils to ask questions and provide comments.

Other Evidence Base Work

9. Over the coming month's consultants will complete studies on a Heritage Review, Carbon Reduction Strategy and an Assessment of Open Space & Recreation Facilities. A more detailed assessment of housing needs for the elderly and other groups will be prepared by officers.

District/Town Parish Council briefings/presentations

10. Two briefing sessions on the Local Plan were given by officers in January to District and local council Members. Another presentation on the progress of the Local Plan and the Issues & Options consultation will be given at the end of June/beginning of July 2012 prior to launching the consultation document. Local Council Members will again be invited to this briefing.

11. Other presentations by consultants on new evidence base documents will be taking place in the upcoming months and a programme detailing dates and times of these briefings will be made available in due course.

Appointment of Fortismere Associates

12. The Council has decided to appoint consultants to assist in the project management of the Council's Local Plan. Fortismere Associates will be reporting to Management Board and Local Plan Cabinet and Cabinet Committees on progress of work.

They have been working with the Forward Planning team (as consultants via the Planning Advisory Service) by offering advice on the timetable and providing a 'critical friend' review of

evidence base documents - to assess whether they are fit for purpose, particularly in view of the on-going changes to the planning system and the abolition of the East of England Plan.

Issue and Options Consultation

13. Work continues on the new population and household projections from the jointly-commissioned Essex Planning Officers' Association study. Officers are continuing to work to a condensed timetable for the new Local Plan, anticipated for submission summer 2013 and are focused at this stage solely on collating and finalising evidence.

14. Consultation on the Issues & Options stage of the Local Plan will run from to end of July 2012 to September 2012. In order to meet the Local Plan delivery deadline it was necessary to keep this summer date and the consultation period may be extended to 8 weeks (from 6 weeks) in order to take into account the main holiday period. The Issues & Options consultation document will not set out detailed proposals for new planning policy, but will identify specific issues, and potential options, for the district over the next 20 years. These will include (i) population and household projections; (ii) strategic distribution of new housing and employment land, and (iii) the information on potential development sites from the SLAA.

Preferred Strategy

15. The Council will take into account the responses made at Issues & Options stage, and any further evidence collected to identify the Preferred Strategy for the district. This stage will include indications of specific land allocations and policies that will be included in the adopted version of the Local Plan.

Neighbourhood Planning

16. A letter and email have been issued to town and parish councils regarding Neighbourhood Planning which includes a link to the Rural Community Council of Essex website, where useful information can be found on the preparation of these Plans: http://www.essexrcc.org.uk/Our_work_with_Communities/Community_Led_Planning/Information_packs/Neighbourhood_Planning_Guide.aspx. The link and information on Neighbourhood Planning are also available on the Council's Local Plan website Planning Our Future: <http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/planningourfuture/default.asp>

17. The Forward Planning team will be solely focused on the delivery of the Local Plan until the submission of the Draft Plan to the Secretary of State. Any support for Neighbourhood Planning would therefore only be possible after submission has been achieved.

18. Local councils will of course be involved in the preparation of the Local Plan and the Forward Planning team has issued a questionnaire to town and parish councils to help identify local priorities and opinions on a series of key topics. Officers also intend to meet local councils for one to one discussions and to visit areas and collate local information.

Reason for decision:

None applicable.

Options considered and rejected:

None applicable.

Consultation undertaken: Management Board

Resource implications:

Budget provision: The delivery of the Local Plan is met through a dedicated budget for this piece of work.

Personnel: The delivery of the Local Plan is the sole focus of the Forward Planning team

Land: The Local Plan will determine land allocations for the District to 2031

Background papers: Draft National Planning Policy Framework

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: N/A

Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A