

Report to the Local Plan Cabinet Committee



Report reference: *LPC-009-2012/13*
Date of meeting: *25 March 2013*

**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Planning and Economic Development
Subject: Feedback on the first three Local Plan Workshops
Responsible Officer: **Kassandra Polyzoides** (01992 564119)
Democratic Services Officer: **Gary Woodhall** (01992 564470)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That Members note the purposes of the workshops and activities undertaken;**
- (2) That Members note the feedback from the workshops;**
- (3) That Members note the proposed action on feedback and next steps in the engagement of District, Town and Parish Councillors through additional workshops; and**
- (4) To consider how to involve the Youth Council in future workshops.**

Executive Summary:

The recent Saturday workshops open to District, County, Parish and Town Councillors and the Youth Council, were designed to assist in considering the options for the future growth of the district and provide a more detailed deliberation of the local areas. They were all well attended, and feedback was increasingly positive as the event programme progressed. The results are being written up to input to the development of the Local Plan, answers are being prepared to report back on the questions arising that could not be dealt with at the time, and lessons learned carried forward. The next two workshops will be on 1) the subject of population projections and the housing requirements for the Local Plan and 2) the results of further testing of options prior to LPCC consideration of the 'Preferred Options' or draft plan for public consultation. It is possible that other issues will arise during the course of production that will be beneficial to consider in a workshop format and this is the subject of a watching brief.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

No decision to be made. Report for information.

Other Options for Action:

Revert to engagement with District, Town and Parish Councillors through Council Bulletin, briefings and LPCC. However, the ability to consider matters in depth presented by a workshop format is considered most beneficial.

Report:

The Purposes and Activities Undertaken in the Three Workshops

1. The first three workshops were held on 26 January, 9 February and 9 March 2013 and were designed to take the participants through a process to enable members and key officers to input to the narrowing of options for the next stage of the Local Plan – the ‘preferred options’ stage or draft plan. They aimed to assist in refining the options for growth from the list set out in the Community Choices document for further testing through more detailed evidence assessments, in particular transport assessment and strategic flood risk assessment.

2. The ground covered was as follows:

(a) Workshop 1:

- Exploration of the context of plan making in terms of national policy;
- Understanding of the key Epping Forest evidence that will inform decisions on local policy;
- Understanding the key messages from the responses to the Community Choices consultation; and
- Consideration of the choices around the future location of housing, economic activity and the transport implications across the District.

(b) Workshop 2:

- Production of visions (possible futures) for the different areas of the District;
- Consideration of the strategic vision/aims and the priority objectives for the District (as factors critical to ultimately agreeing the preferred choices);
- Beginning to discuss and consider the impact of the vision and aims for the area on different potential patterns of development in the District; and
- Provision of a baseline for workshop three.

(c) Workshop 3:

- Consideration of what the visions (possible futures) for the different areas of the District that groups produced in workshop 2 mean for places in detail – what could happen where and when?;
- Firming up ideas on preferences for the development or protection of areas; and
- Consideration of some detailed issues around the need for development management procedures for dealing with planning applications such as design, conservation and parking.

Attendance and Feedback

3. The attendance levels at the workshops were good, with 52, 50 and 53 councillors attending the three workshops respectively. The split between District, County, and Parish and Town Councillors is set out below (to avoid double counting those only holding a County seat are noted separately to joint District or Parish and County Councillors). In the end, there were unfortunately no attendees from the Youth Council:

- Workshop 1: 36 District Councillors, 1 County Councillor and 15 Town/ Parish Councillors or Clerks.
- Workshop 2: 34 District Councillors, 1 County Councillor and 15 Town/ Parish Councillors or Clerks
- Workshop 3: 31 District Councillors, 1 County Councillor and 21 Town/ Parish Councillors or Clerks

4. Feedback on the workshops was sought each time and the following numbers of forms were received: Workshop 1 – 9 forms, Workshop 2 – 6 forms, Workshop 3 – 33 forms. The overall

assessments are set out in the table below in response to the question 'How useful did you find the workshop?'

| | Not at all useful | Not very useful | Quite useful | Very useful | Extremely useful | Total responses |
|-------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Workshop 1 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 9 (1 gave no response to the question) |
| Workshop 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| Workshop 3 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 16 | 7 | 33 (1 gave 'between quite and very useful') |

5. The collated responses will be placed in the Members' room. The overall tenor of the small proportion of responses to the first workshop received was patchy, the most common concern expressed in feedback related to too many presentations which were hard to read at the start of the day and the activity involving distributing development across the district. There was also concern expressed by one respondent regarding the handling of questions which was considered to be rushed and insensitive. However, most respondents commented that they had found the opportunity to discuss matters with others valuable. The feedback from the second workshop was more positive focusing on the welcomed ample opportunities to discuss areas local to the participants and formulate local visions. The feedback from the third workshop was almost overwhelmingly positive and many commented on the helpfulness of staff and the usefulness of the mapped information provided.

6. The matters that participants are interested to know more about are population projections and housing targets, brownfield sites, the ownership of certain sites, landscape appraisals and how the infrastructure will be provided to support development. A note on the work undertaken on the brownfield review and questions and answers raised has been circulated to all Members and will be published in the Council Bulletin.

Next Steps

7. A record of all of the work undertaken at the workshops is being, or has already been, written up and this will be used by officers to test the options set out in the Community Choices consultation, and formulate proposals for the Plan. A series of question and answer papers are also being produced for wider use responding to questions raised.

8. As a result of the issues raised by Members and the feedback from the workshop, an additional workshop (workshop 4) is planned in the summer to cover the issues of population projections and housing targets for the plan. A report will then be brought to Local Plan Cabinet Committee for Members to provide a steer on which of the options should be tested further (including a transport assessment and strategic flood risk assessment of these options). A fifth workshop will be held when this further evidence testing of options for the plan has been undertaken and prior to recommendations to Local Plan Cabinet Committee on a preferred option or draft plan.

9. The experience of the workshops has indicated that they are a very valuable forum for the councillors and should be used more often to consider complex matters of the Local Plan. It is possible that other issues will arise during the course of production that will be beneficial to consider in a workshop format and this is the subject of a watching brief.

Resource Implications:

The additional workshops are to be resourced within current budgets and the benefit of this engagement with councillors far outweighs any costs involved since it engages key stakeholders in the process and enables them to both steer the outcome and have a good understanding of the plan to impart to constituents and other stakeholders.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The workshops operate within the governance procedures for the plan and are not decision making events.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The eventual Local Plan will have significant implications for the green characteristics of the District and recognises that there are tensions with achieving development to provide homes and employment for local families.

Consultation Undertaken:

None.

Background Papers:

Agenda and presentations for Workshops 1 on 26 January 2013, Workshop 2 on 9 February 2013 and Workshop 3 on 9 March 2013.

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

Members were advised of lessons learned by other Councils from recent Inspectorate decisions on local plans. The workshops are part of the process of developing a sound plan.

Equality and Diversity

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
The new Local Plan will consider these issues.

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?
N/A.