

Report to Local Councils' Liaison Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Date of meeting: 4th July 2103

Portfolio: Planning

Subject: Local Plan and Neighbourhood Planning update

Responsible Officer: Kassandra Polyzoides (01992 564119)

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

None required

Executive Summary:

Responses to Community Choices consultation have been fully reviewed and a report was submitted to Cabinet Committee in June. The Member workshop outputs are also being circulated to attendees. A revised timetable has been published and work continues in order to ensure that the next stage consultation, the Preferred Options in Spring of 2014 is met. Updated Neighbourhood Planning guidance was placed on the Council's website and circulated to town and parish Councils and the first designation of a Neighbourhood Area has been considered for Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers at July Cabinet.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

N/A

Other Options for Action:

None

Report:

1. Community Choices Consultation. The Issues & Options consultation (called 'Community Choices') for the new Local Plan took place between 30th July and 15th October 2012. A total of 3,556 'real' responses were received (see next section for explanation), representing a total of 5,989 people (because some responses were from groups).

The Community Choices consultation document set out the main issues to be considered by the planning system over the next twenty years, and potential options to address these issues. The main purposes of the consultation were:

- a) to ask our communities whether they considered all the relevant issues and options had been identified in the document.
- b) to receive suggestions for additions, and
- c) to seek views on the options presented in the document.

Community Choices was not a policy document setting out an intended development plan. However, the consultation is an important part of the evidence gathering process which helps

the Council to understand the opinions, concerns and interests of our local communities. This will assist the Council to make balanced decisions on land allocations and other planning matters. The public consultation exercises, which are a fundamental part of the preparation of the new Local Plan, help the Council to engage with the local community, explain the need for change and to find the best solutions when planning new development.

Overall, 4,083 responses were received, representing 6,537 people. However, some of these were duplicates, i.e. from the same person. This meant that there were actually 3,556 'real' responses representing a total of 5,989 people. Please note however that all of the responses have been considered and analysed, even if more than one was received from the same person. In considering the detail of the responses in the appendix of the Cabinet report, it is important to consider percentages in the context of the number of responses to individual questions.

Responses were received from all but 8 of the district's Parish and Town Councils; these 8 covered some of the more rural areas. Of the ten equivalent planning authorities which adjoin this district, responses were received from nine of them - Brentwood Borough Council, Broxbourne Borough Council, Chelmsford City Council, East Herts Council, Harlow District Council, London Boroughs of Enfield, Redbridge and Waltham Forest; and Uttlesford District Council. The only one not responding was the London Borough of Havering. Comments were also made by other local authorities and equivalent bodies; Braintree District Council, the Conservators of Epping Forest (City of London Corporation), Essex County Council, the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and Sawbridgeworth Town Council.

The Council also received responses from many statutory bodies and national organisations including the Environment Agency, Natural England, Transport for London, Highways Agency, Mayor's Office for Policing & Crime, Anglian Water, the Civil Aviation Authority, Epping Forest & Commons Committee, Essex Police, NHS North Essex, Sport England, Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, Stansted Airport Ltd, Thames Water Utilities Ltd, the Theatres Trust, The Canal & River Trust and CPREssex.

A detailed report was submitted and discussed at 10th June Cabinet. The report sets out an analysis of the responses received, including the proportion of respondents who selected particular options, and some qualitative comments on the reasons most often given for answers. Minutes of the Cabinet meeting will have been published and made available on the Council's website by the time of this meeting.

As detailed above, further evidence based work is being commissioned which will feed into future consultations on the Local Plan. Officers are preparing assessments of individual sites and working on the Green Belt review. Once the further population work is complete there will be another Member workshop specifically to discuss population and household growth and its implications. Following finalisation of the additional evidence work listed in the previous section, a final Member workshop will be held, to enable Members to provide a steer on the 'preferred option(s)'. The ensuing 'Draft Plan' will be discussed and finalised at the relevant committees, and then public consultation will take place in 2014. A revised timetable, Local Development Scheme, and updated budget report will be presented to July Cabinet.

2. Member workshops. The workshops provided useful information and a steer from towns and parishes, both in terms of the vision for their areas and information about future requirements and constraints. Officers are keen to continue to review and agree how the role of town and parish Councils can be further explored.

3. Local Plan Communications and Engagement strategy.

The level of officer resource allocated for the engagement with town/parish Council's for the Local Plan, has been high. Comments from Members and this committee with regard to how this can be improved have been taken on board and this is an ongoing dialogue. The continued active role of town and parish Councils during engagement would be foreseen as assisting the Council in disseminating information to local communities and 'getting the word out' during the consultation periods, actively participating during drop-in sessions and workshops and responding in detail to the consultation documents. It is important to add that the level of initiative and active engagement e.g. response to statutory consultations to date has varied considerably between local councils. For instance in terms of take up from Councils to meet on site and discuss local planning issues with Forward Planning officers as part of the Community Choices, 11 out of 24 agreed to do so. It is therefore important that this committee continues to provide officers with clarity as to which initiatives they find useful. Equally it is important for town and parish Councils to actively engage with planning officers and the opportunities provided for engagement once these have been agreed. Local Councils fulfil a very important function of providing a link between EFDC and local communities, and a detailed knowledge of their localities. The Local Plan communications strategy, which outlines how EFDC aim to engage with stakeholders is available on the Planning Our Future website. <http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/index.php/contact-us/consultation/planning-our-future>. The document has also been submitted as Appendix item 1 to this report. The document provides an indication of how EFDC proposes to continue to engage with stakeholders including town and parish Councils and it is recommended that local councils read and agree on what would be useful involvement wise for the next stage of consultation. Any additional requests to what has been outlined would need to be considered with regard to the resources available within the Forward Planning team during the duration of the consultations.

4. Neighbourhood Planning

Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) were introduced as part of the Localism Act 2011 and enable local communities (town/parish council's or designated neighbourhood forums) to produce Neighbourhood Plans which when approved are part of the statutory development plan and adopted as Council policy. NDPs need to be grounded in Local Plan evidence and include intensive consultation and stakeholder engagement. There are specific statutory responsibilities that Council's need to fulfil under the Localism Act to facilitate the preparation of a NDP. One of these is to provide advice and assistance to communities in the production of plans. The level of advice and assistance to town and parish councils by EFDC is outlined below. To support local planning authorities in this work, financial support has been provided by the DCLG. For 2013/14 LPAs can claim £5,000 following each designation of a Neighbourhood Plan Area. A further payment of £5,000 becomes available when the local authority publicises the Neighbourhood Development Plan prior to examination and a third payment of £20,000 on the successful completion of an independent examination. It is not clear whether funding will be available beyond this period. Separately to this there is, for the period from 2013/2015, support by way of grant payments up to £7,000 per Neighbourhood Area to contribute to the costs incurred by the group preparing the NDP. This programme is being delivered by Locality <http://locality.org.uk/>.

On the basis that the Council's number one priority is the delivery of the Local Plan, and the Forward Planning teams' capacity, the level of advice and assistance provided to local councils for Neighbourhood Planning extends to:

- a) Inception meeting to discuss local council aspirations and ensure clarity around level of EFDC support and required information for designation, discuss project plan/programme for development of the plan;
- b) Provide relevant updates and advice online regarding regulations, funding and Local Plan information, including emerging evidence base;
- c) Signposting to all existing evidence base, other relevant studies and documents, ward profile information and data and maps;
- d) Although an inception meeting is made available, this does not include subsequent meetings or attendance at evening meetings. A named officer will be available to answer key questions and provide updates on Local Plan work via telephone and email.
- e) Provide comments on a draft NDP and supporting documentation on conformity of the plan with the Local Plan and whether it meets the basic conditions and other legislative requirements.

Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers Parish Council submitted an application for a Neighbourhood Area designation in order to progress with a Neighbourhood Plan – this has now been publicised on the Council’s website in accordance with the regulations and representations invited during a six week period which ended on 18 June 2013. In addition to the publicity on the website the Parish Council publicised the application in their newsletters and the Council has written to were received. A report has been prepared to go to Cabinet on 29 July 2013 asking for the designation of the Neighbourhood Area and to agree future governance arrangements. The regulations highlight that the Local Planning Authorities responsibilities include advising or assisting communities in the preparation of a neighbourhood plan. Specifically the 1990 Act Schedule 4B para 3 states:

“A local planning authority must give such advice or assistance to qualifying bodies as, in all the circumstances, they consider appropriate for the purpose of, or in connection with, facilitating the making of proposals for NDPs in relation to neighbourhood areas within their area” This applies to NDPs through S3A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. There is no requirement to give financial assistance.

The Council’s number one priority is the delivery of the Local Plan, and regard is being given to the Forward Planning team’s capacity in dealing with NPDs in addition to the existing workload. For this reason the Cabinet report has recommended that the level of advice and assistance provided to local councils for Neighbourhood Planning extends to:

- f) Inception meeting to discuss local council aspirations and ensure clarity around level of EFDC support and required information for designation, discuss project plan/programme for development of the plan;
- g) Provide relevant updates and advice online regarding regulations, funding and Local Plan information, including emerging evidence base;
- h) Signposting to all existing evidence base, other relevant studies and documents, ward profile information and data and maps;
- i) Although an inception meeting is made available, this does not include subsequent meetings or attendance at evening meetings. A named officer will be available to answer key questions and provide updates on Local Plan work via telephone and email.
- j) Provide comments on a draft NDP and supporting documentation on conformity of the plan with the Local Plan and whether it meets the basic conditions and other legislative requirements

Resource Implications:

None

Legal and Governance Implications:

None

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None

Consultation Undertaken:

None

Background Papers:

Cabinet report- Responses to the Community Choices (Issues & Options) consultation for the Local Plan, held in 2012.

Planning Our Future: Communications and Engagement Strategy

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

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?

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
Text for implications identified...

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?
Text for addressing implications...