

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 18 February 2016

Subject: Planning Policy

Portfolio Holder: Councillor R Bassett

Recommending:

That the report of the Planning Policy Portfolio Holder be noted

1) Local Plan Member Workshops

Many of the issues that our Local Plan needs to address are complex. To assist understanding and obtain Members' views in order for the planning policy team to develop policy options for the Draft Local Plan Preferred Approach consultation later this year, Local Plan workshops continue to be held.

District and Town and Parish Council representatives attended three workshops during November 2015 that considered in turn: the Historic Environment, the Natural Environment and Green Networks, the economic strategy (including food production, glasshouse industry, tourism and live/work) and affordable housing / housing for an ageing population. All three workshops were very well attended and afforded an opportunity to advise Members of emerging key issues on these matters. Members provided valuable information and opinions on the matters presented.

Feedback received indicates that most Members found that the format worked well having officers first explain the issues, national policy and what the evidence says before then having the opportunity to debate possible policy options. Following on from the three successful and well attended all Member workshops run last November, on 28th January a further workshop was held that looked at high quality design. Members will of course continue to be notified of arrangements and topics to be considered at future workshops run over the next few months. This will include a workshop focussing on the Green Belt Stage 2 work as explained further below.

2) Update on key evidence work

Work continues on finalising the evidence base reports which will be used to inform the policies included in the Draft Plan Preferred Approach for consultation. In particular work has been completed on key pieces of technical evidence relating to potential housing and jobs numbers and can be viewed via the Local Plan evidence base page of the Council's website.

Green Belt Review:

Government guidance and emerging Inspectors' reports make clear the need to undertake a comprehensive Green Belt Review of the entire District before the release of any Green Belt land through the local plan process is considered. It is important to remember that the outcome of the Green Belt Review is only one, albeit an extremely important, piece of the evidence base that will inform the Council's

future plan-making decisions.

Following completion of the Stage 1 work reported to Cabinet last September, work on the Green Belt Review Stage 2 is progressing. This work is being undertaken by external consultants, Land Use Consultants (LUC), appointed in the autumn. The fieldwork and analysis are nearing completion. The work will provide an assessment against the five green belt purposes set out in paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 of the broad locations identified in stage 1. This in turn will assist the Council in deciding:

- The areas where the Green Belt policy designation should remain;
- Any historic anomalies in the existing boundaries or locations where development has taken place, which may therefore suggest minor amendments to the Green Belt boundaries are required;
- Areas that may be least harmful in Green Belt terms if released from the Green Belt.

It therefore follows that, simply because a parcel, or part of the parcel, is being appraised as part of the more detailed work, this does not necessarily mean that it should / will be allocated for development in the emerging Local Plan, or that the Council would look favourably on a planning application.

The consultants' brief includes provision for workshops with officers, District Council members and Parish/Town Council representatives to feed into the work. Once the Stage 2 study has been completed, together with the other evidence, the findings of the Green Belt Review will be used to inform the Draft Plan Preferred Approach for consultation later this year.

Settlement Capacity Work

The Council is also undertaking a settlement capacity analysis of the 10 largest settlements in the District, namely Epping, Theydon Bois, Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell, Loughton/Debden, Waltham Abbey, North Weald Bassett, Chipping Ongar, Lower Nazeing and Roydon. The purpose of the work is to ensure that the District can address as much of its housing requirement as possible within our existing settlements, and so minimise the potential need to utilise Green Belt land for development. All District Members were invited to a meeting held on 4th February 2016 where the consultants presented how the models work and examples of their emerging findings. Like Stage 2 of the Green Belt Review, the results of this work will be used to inform, and be published alongside, the consultation Draft Plan Preferred Approach.

Transport

To help inform the best way to meet the objectively assessed housing need identified in the work by ORS for the Strategic Housing Market Area, and reported to Cabinet in October 2015, further transport modelling work is being undertaken by Essex County Council. This will look at the implications for the transport network of growth and how it can be distributed across the Housing Market Area. The outputs will then be considered by the districts and jointly by the four authorities at the Cooperation for Sustainable Development Board. This work is being progressed using support from ATLAS and facilitated by AECOM to undertake a sustainability appraisal on the

impact of strategic growth options in the four authorities to meet the overall housing and employment figures for the SHMA area. Officers have met with Natural England to consider the impact on air quality in particular for Epping Forest.

Officers have also been involved in transport work being undertaken by the London Borough of Enfield and continue to keep a watching brief on wider transport work being undertaken as part of Enfield's Northern Gateway Access Package (NGAP).

Historic Environment Characterisation Study

This piece of work is being undertaken for EFDC by Essex County Council. The principal aim of the study is to provide an assessment of the historic environment character of the District.

Characterisation is a well-established approach to landscape analysis and management and is specifically identified in the NPPF. The characterisation will inform the Local Plan and provide guidance to planning officers about the varied and important historic environment of the District. The results of the characterisation study could also be used as an integral part of any future Green Infrastructure Strategy for the District. In addition, it can provide a foundation from which to develop other opportunities, including as a source of evidence for Neighbourhood Plans, for using the Historic Environment as the cultural heart/root of new and existing communities.

It is anticipated that study will be complete towards the end of March.

3) Duty to Cooperate:

Officers and Members continue to meet regularly with appropriate authorities, principally through the Cooperation for Sustainable Development officer group and Member Board, to consider a wide range of cross boundary issues. In addition to the post SHMA, Employment and Green Belt Review work reported above, the Lea Valley Food Taskforce continues to develop a programme for growth around one of the District's historic and still important sectors.

The four SHMA authorities have recently jointly appointed a Strategic Sites Coordinator whose role is to technically assess and appraise all the sites which have been put forward through the SLAAs around Harlow on a consistent basis.

We have also responded in January to the latest consultation for Enfield which is similar to issues and options for a new plan. We ensured that the Loughton and Waltham Abbey Town councils were aware and had a chance to respond.

We also received a copy of Stevenage Local Plan Consultation. Although we obviously do not have a common boundary with Stevenage Borough Council, we are linked by virtue of both being part of the Rye Meads Sewage Treatment Works catchment – hence the above consultation which requires a response by 17th February. We have had a quick look through the document and are satisfied with the references being made to co-operation between authorities and utilities providers regarding the current and future capacity of the Works. We therefore propose therefore to send an officer-level response to the consultation indicating satisfaction with the references to Rye Meads, and advising that there are no other comments.

4) Lea Valley Food Taskforce

The taskforce has just completed the second in a series of workshops to examine the potential for agreeing a joint planning framework to support the sustainability and expansion of the industry in the Lea valley, which would help inform the relevant sections of the EFDC local Plan. This was again attended by representatives from the industry, education and councils from a number of neighbouring local authorities. The Judicial Review with LVRP over the Valley grown Nurseries expansion was heard at the end of January and we are expecting a verdict in March. This will have a major impact on how we view glasshouse applications for expansion and also will impact the LVRP and their future response to planning applications from the industry.

One of the main issues identified was to ensure that plans and proposals were fully integrated and supported by the London Plan. The following meeting of the Taskforce received a presentation from the GLA including a message of support from Mayor's Food advisor Rosie Boycott. The taskforce has now requested a formal meeting with the GLA to represent the views of the organisations/councils from within and outside London who have been supporting the work of the Taskforce.

The Chairman will be meeting owners of the major pack houses over the next month to discuss their thoughts on opportunities for expansion, land availability and cost.

Proposals are being discussed with a college around opportunities to develop a bespoke degree level qualification around glasshouse work, this would enable a progression from introductory qualification to level four.

The taskforce has again been contacted by European partners around potential resubmission of the Interreg Bioboost project and we are talking with contacts in industry and education on whether this is viable.

A programme of strategic work has been proposed by the taskforce to SELEP, unfortunately the Chief executive of SELEP who was very supportive and had spent a day at local glasshouses, has now left. Officers are now in discussion with the interim Chief Executive to see if this programme can be pushed forward.

5) Neighbourhood Planning:

The neighbourhood plan for Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers is currently being advertised for the requisite 6 weeks prior to going forward to independent examination in March.

There are seven other Parish and Town Councils that have applied to designate neighbourhood planning areas for their areas which have been approved (Chigwell, Epping, Buckhurst Hill, Theydon Bois, Loughton, North Weald Bassett and Epping Upland). In addition, Waltham Abbey has recently applied for neighbourhood area designation which is currently under consideration.

6) Housing & Planning Bill and CLG NPPF Consultation

The Housing & Planning Bill published in October last year makes clear that the Government is serious about increasing housing supply. Measures have been included to streamline the planning process; to facilitate starter homes, self builds and building on brownfield land. It is proposed that more powers are given to the Secretary of State to take over plan making, decision taking and effectively impose financial penalties on local authorities with high-value vacant buildings.

As reported in a recent Members bulletin, the Government is currently consulting on proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in 2012. The consultation document can be viewed on the CLG website. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488276/151207_Consultation_document.pdf. There will shortly be a second consultation on the criteria for intervention in local plan making.

The changes in the Bill, if introduced in the form currently proposed, would be likely to have significant implications for Epping Forest District and the drafting of our Local Plan - particularly proposed changes in respect of Starter Homes and Green Belt policy. The absence of detail to explain some of the proposed changes, particularly those around Starter Homes, makes it difficult at this stage to give a definitive view on some of the matters raised in the consultation. As ever, in terms of implementation, 'the devil will be in the detail'. In this case it is likely to come in the form of draft Regulations to support the introduction of the Housing and Planning Bill which has now completed its Third Reading in the House of Commons.

A response was drafted addressing each of the 23 questions which were considered at the Neighbourhood and Communities Select Committee on 19th January 2016. As CLG extended the consultation period until 22nd February 2016 Members of the Select Committee requested that all District Councillors be afforded an opportunity to consider and comment on the proposed consultation response. Accordingly, the final response that I sent was able to take account of a few additional points and concerns raised by Members.