

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-033-2023-24

Date of meeting: 18 December 2023



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leader of the Council (Cllr Chris Whitbread)

Subject: Place Delivery Strategy for Epping Forest District

Responsible Officer: Georgina Blakemore (Chief Executive)

Democratic Services Officer: V Messenger (democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To note the comments made by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 21 November 2023 together with the officer response.**
- (2) To endorse the Place Delivery Strategy for Epping Forest District as a strategic framework for informing the Council's approach to managing and using its land and property assets (including through Qualis as a wholly owned company) and working in partnership with other public bodies to secure positive outcomes for the community of Epping Forest District.**
- (3) To endorse the next steps of developing an Action Plan for the creation of Place Plans as set out in the Place Delivery Strategy for Epping Forest District.**
- (4) To delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, any minor changes to the Place Delivery Strategy as may be required following its consideration by the Council's Cabinet.**

Executive Summary:

The purpose of developing a Place Delivery Strategy for Epping Forest District is to provide a 'high-level' corporate framework which draws on a range of existing plans and strategies in order to support the delivery of the Council's ambitions through the use of its land and property holdings. It also provides the opportunity moving forward to inform the development of other plans and strategies which are relevant to the use of those land and property assets whether they are within its direct ownership or through its delivery arm Qualis. It also provides the opportunity to influence how other public bodies make use of their own property and land assets within the district to support the achievement of the Council's objectives and priorities.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Making the best use of the Council's property and land assets as well as influencing how place-based partners use their own property and land assets is key to achieving the ambitions of the Council as articulated through, in particular, the Corporate Plan 2023 -2027 and the adopted Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011 – 2033.

Other Options for Action:

There is no legal requirement to develop such a strategy. However, the Council has a custodial responsibility to make the best use of its assets. As such the Council has determined to take a

leadership role in delivering of this responsibility. To not develop a framework to provide an integrated approach to delivering the Council's ambitions for the district's communities would limit its ability to do so in the most proactive and effective way.

Report:

1. The Council has a range of roles and responsibilities in providing services to the community of Epping Forest District. It also has a range of land and property assets ranging from social housing through to commercial properties and open spaces. How it manages and uses those land and property assets in the short, medium and long term is a critical component in achieving the Council's ambitions for Epping Forest District.
2. The purpose of developing a Place Delivery Strategy for Epping Forest District is to provide a 'high-level' corporate framework which draws on a range of existing and plans and strategies in order to support the delivery of the Council's ambitions through the use of its land and property holdings. It also provides the opportunity moving forward to inform the development of other plans and strategies which are relevant to the use of those land and property assets whether they are within its direct ownership or through its delivery arm Qualis.
3. The Place Delivery Strategy is intended to support the delivery of the place-based ambitions of the Council and its partners. A number of plans and strategies have informed the development of the Place Delivery Strategy for Epping Forest including (but not limited to):
 - Your Epping Forest: The Corporate Plan for 2023 -2027
 - Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011-2033
 - Epping Forest Health and Well-being Strategy 2022-2026
 - Climate Change Action Plan
 - Housing Strategy 2023 – 2027
 - Nurturing Growth 2020-2025
4. The Place Delivery Strategy identifies approaches that the Council proposes to take forward in managing its property and land assets either directly or through Qualis.
5. Following the endorsement of the Place Delivery Strategy it is proposed that the Council will develop an Action Plan which will set out the activities needed to take forward the implementation of the Strategy including how the 'Place Plans' referred to in the Place Delivery Strategy will be developed. The Action Plan will identify any relevant operational practices which may need to be reviewed to support the delivery of the Place Delivery Strategy, the processes for doing so and the decision-making route for the development of the Place Plans. The Action Plan will also set out how the Council will engage with other public bodies to influence how property and land assets within their control located within the district could be managed and used to achieve the Council's ambitions for the community of Epping Forest District.
6. It is important to note that the Place Delivery Strategy builds on the Vision and Objectives of the Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011-2033 and the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town. The use of the Council's land and property assets will be considered within this context and the Strategy is intended to be complimentary to these decision-making planning frameworks.

Scrutiny Comments

The Place Delivery Strategy for Epping Forest District was considered by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 21 November 2023. The comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are summarised below together with officer comments:

- i) Update reference to Scrutiny– now Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Communities Scrutiny Committee, and Place Scrutiny Committee.
Officer comment: The report reflects the above. It is noted that the names of the Scrutiny Committees has changed and no longer reflect the ‘titles’ of the three core themes set out in the ‘Your Epping Forest: The Corporate Plan for 2023 -2027’.
- ii) Should the partnerships with other public sector bodies necessary to develop the Place Delivery Strategy, be more explicit.
Officer comment: The Place Delivery Strategy has been amended to reflect this comment.
- iii) Ongar – should be ‘Chipping Ongar’ and comprises of 4 areas – include Greensted.
Officer comment: The text set out in Appendix 2 comprises extracts from the Council’s adopted Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011-2033. As such there is no mechanism to make amendments to that text. Notwithstanding this there is an opportunity to respond to the comment made in due course through the development of the Place Plan for Ongar.
- iv) Local Plan emphasis for development is on Local Plan, but could there be greater reference to rural communities,
Officer comment: The Place Delivery Strategy has been amended to reflect this comment.
- v) Highlight that individual development decision will be subject to normal governance routes and approvals.
Officer comment: The Place Delivery Strategy has been amended to reflect this comment.
- vi) Section 6 ‘funding our approach’ should this include Essex Council Tax Sharing Scheme, and payments from Qualis.
Officer comment: As these fall within the ‘umbrella’ of the General Fund the Place Delivery Plan for Epping Forest District has not been amended in this regard.
- vii) Domestic Abuse – definition should be more inclusive.
Officer comment: The reference to ‘domestic abuse’ is taken directly from the Council’s ‘Your Epping Forest: The Corporate Plan 2023-2027.’
- vii) Protection of Green Open Space: can green space in urban areas be protected with Fields in Trust Status.
Officer comment: Green spaces in urban areas are currently protected through Policy SP6 ‘The Natural Environment, Landscape Character and Green and Blue Infrastructure’ of the Council’s adopted Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011-2033. In particular Policy SP6 C iii) sets out that ‘The green and blue infrastructure assets of the towns, villages and rural communities will be protected and the quality of existing greenspace will be improved.’ It is noted that a number of green spaces within the district already have Fields in Trust Status.
- viii) Update to Qualis Groups to reflect current structure.
Officer comment: The Place Delivery Strategy reflects the current structure including the very recent incorporation of Qualis Land Ltd as a subsidiary of Qualis Commercial Ltd.
- ix) No reference to Epping Forest Museum in Vision for Waltham Abbey section.
Officer comment: See response to Point iii) above.
- x) Requested an update on the proposed action plan, and any measured enhancements to green and blue open space to Overview and Scrutiny/Place in the next municipal year.
Officer comment: This request will be taken forward through inclusion in the 2024/25 Overview and Scrutiny Committee workplan.

Resource Implications:

The Place Delivery Strategy supports the efficient and effective use of the Council’s resources.

Legal and Governance Implications:

There are no legal or governance implications. The Place Delivery Strategy can be delivered within the context of the Council’s relevant statutory powers.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The Place Delivery Strategy will support the achievement of a number of the Council’s Corporate Plan ambitions and Council activities.

Consultation / Scrutiny Undertaken:

The development of the Place Delivery Strategy has drawn on plans and strategies that have previously been the subject of extensive consultation with relevant stakeholders depending on the nature and purpose of those strategies. The Place Delivery Strategy was considered by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 November 2023.

Background Papers:

N/A

Risk Management:

No specific risks arise as a result of this report.

Equality:

An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out and there was a positive impact.