

Introduction

Following the closure of the Local Plan Examination in December the Chief Executive received a request from representatives of Elsenham and Henham residents for an inquiry into the local plan process to date. This report follows from that request.

At Scrutiny Committee on 10th February 2015, a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Services sought approval for the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to progress the review. The report stated that “Officers are of the view that it would not be possible for anyone directly associated with the Council to carry out this review. Accordingly an approach has been made to the Local Government Association (LGA) and through them to the PAS to enquire of their availability to undertake the review. The purpose of PAS is to support local planning authorities to provide effective and efficient planning services, to drive improvement in those services and to respond to and deliver changes in the planning system.”

The brief which was agreed, and which is delivered through this report, was:

That PAS starts by reviewing the Inspectors Examination Conclusions in his letter to the Council dated 19th December 2014 and that the PAS will:

- Summarise the issues the Inspector raised, to ensure there is a common understanding;
- Provide a high level review of the work carried out on the plan to date, including technical work, engagement with stakeholders and governance arrangements;
- Highlight, by way of examples from elsewhere in the country, where the issues raised have commonality with current practices; and,
- Consider how the council can move forward, making recommendations as appropriate.

This review seeks to assist the Council in learning from the process to date, and also in setting out how work can move forward positively.

However, it is important to note that this review is not:

- a) Any kind of inspection at the end of which there would be some kind of assessment or grading, either of individuals or the council as a whole.
- b) A substitute for legal advice on any particular issue raised. It is advice from independent professionals, but cannot be seen to form, or supersede any legal advice, and would therefore be provided without prejudice to any future examinations, challenges or appeals.

Following the agreement at the February Scrutiny Committee, PAS undertook the elements set out in points I-IV above, and this report sets out the findings.