

LOCAL PLAN WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 9.30am on 1 NOVEMBER 2013

Present: Councillor J Ketteridge– Chairman.
Councillors S Barker, J Cheetham, K Eden, K Mackman, J Menell, E Oliver, V Ranger, H Rolfe, J Rose and D Watson.

Also present: Councillors C Cant, R Eastham, E Hicks and J Redfern.

Officers in attendance: M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), R Harborough (Director of Public Services), M Jones (Principal Planning Officer), H Hayden (Planning Officer) and A Taylor (Assistant Director Planning and Building Control).

LP16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Godwin

Councillor Barker declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Essex County Council.

LP17 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2013 were approved and signed as a correct record.

LP18 BUSINESS ARISING

Minute LP11 – Future housing growth requirement

Councillor Dean said the minutes stated that ‘the council had only recently been advised of the preference for SNPP projections’, when in fact these projections had been around for least the last 12 months. Officers replied that there had been no change to the base figures used, what had altered was the clear direction from the Government on which scenario should be used. The highest rate of population projections had not been insisted on at the beginning of the process, but it was now apparent that Inspectors were using the SNPP forecast.

LP19 ADDITIONAL HOUSING SITES

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control presented a report that considered a number of options for delivering the additional housing that was required to meet the revised objectively assessed need for market and affordable housing in the district.

The methodology for the selection of the sites had been based on the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and the available evidence base. The sites which scored well in the SHLAA had been considered under the following options.

Option A –Maintain the approach in the draft plan, look again at additional sites in Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and key villages.

Option B –Increase the amount of development further down the hierarchy.

Option C –Allow for larger scale development in the market towns and/or more key villages.

Option D –A new settlement.

It was found that there were insufficient suitable sites under options A and B to meet the additional scale of need required, which meant that large scale development in one or more settlement would need to be considered.

It was still the council's view that a single settlement was not necessary. The hierarchy approach would deliver housing, including affordable housing, throughout the district and additional infrastructure would be provided.

The methodology concluded that the additional housing requirement should be met by:

- a. Releasing part of the employment site at Ashdon Road, Saffron Walden for housing to deliver a mixed scheme including new high quality employment floorspace. (170)
- b. Including an additional site on the western edge of Dunmow (south of the B1256 and north of the Fritch Way) (400)
- c. Allowing the redevelopment of Helena Romanes School in Great Dunmow to provide an enabling development to finance the delivery of a new secondary school (100)
- d. Including land North east of Elsenham as an extension to the existing village (2100)

These proposals would be subject to public consultation and the impact of these new sites would be assessed by updated studies.

Members asked a number of questions about the proposal for the new school in Great Dunmow and how it would be financed. The Assistant Director said this initiative had been put forward by the school in order to meet increased demand. He explained how contributions from other development schemes could contribute to the cost of the project.

A member commented that the proposal for the land north east of Elsenham looked like the beginning of a new settlement. The Assistant Director said that proposals for the site had always been linked with Elsenham village. Members were concerned about the provision of the necessary infrastructure

for the site and the surrounding area and were advised that the policy provided for infrastructure to a level that met the needs of the size of the development.

Councillor Dean referred to option A (distributed strategy) and one of the listed disadvantages that 'constraints in some settlements means that other settlements will need to take disproportionately more housing'. He said it was clear that Elsenham was taking a disproportionate amount. He thought it would be worth looking at smaller villages as there had been no adequate assessment of these sites and it appeared that a number of potential sites were being ruled out. In response, Councillor Barker said that although the small sites would contribute to the annual windfall amount these weren't sufficient to contribute to the numbers required. It was also difficult to provide high quality infrastructure for small sites.

A number of members commented that the working group had looked at everything on the table for a number of years and the sites been subject to previous consultations. These proposals had not come out of the blue.

Councillor Rolfe said he supported the recommendation. He was proud of the process so far and felt that the council had done the right thing to plan initially for a lower number but it was clear that the coalition now was firming its view on housing. Those sites already consulted would remain in the plan but there was a need to provide for the extra houses and to balance these sites across the district. It was important to take account of the evidence base and to keep residents informed of the detailed site proposals.

Councillor Rose asked about the future of secondary school provision across the district to accommodate the anticipated growth. The Assistant Director reported that he had met with the secondary school heads and ECC officers. The schools were considering different scenarios for future provision, although this final decision would ultimately be made by the County Council.

Councillor Watson said that the working group was intent on continuing on its course of action and would not change anything unless forced to do so. He felt that the action taken so far had not addressed problems in Saffron Walden in relation to highways and air quality. The additional settlements proposed were the wrong policy and he thought the council should do something different and brave to address future housing provision.

Some members were concerned that there seemed to be little control over the rate of delivery of houses on larger sites that had received planning position. It was accepted that this was a problem in some areas but the Director of Public Services confirmed that on the whole the annual rate of deliverability was the same as had been delivered during the past few years.

The working group noted the following sites as additional sites for further consultation

- a. Ashdon Road Saffron Walden
- b. Land to the west of Great Dunmow and south of Stortford Road

- c. Land at Helena Romanes School
- d. Land north east of Elsenham.

LP20

CONSULTATION ON HOUSING NUMBERS AND ADDITIONAL SITES

Members received the proposed consultation paper on the increased housing numbers and additional sites for the Local Plan.

The previous item had identified preferred sites to accommodate the extra housing numbers. The sites at Ashdon Road Saffron Walden, west of Great Dunmow and south of Stortford Road and north east of Elsenham had been identified in the SHLAA and so had been subject to the consultation in January 2012. The fourth site at Helena Romana School had not been subject to previous consultation, so for consistency it was agreed that there should be an opportunity to consult on the revised housing numbers and the additional sites.

The public consultation would run from Monday 18th November 2013– Monday 13th January 2014, this included an extra 2 weeks to take account of the Christmas period. Anyone who had previously commented on the Local Plan would receive email notification, and publicity would be carried out in accordance with recently agreed procedures.

Following the consultation, officers would prepare a report of the responses, this would be considered by members and any changes made to the draft plan. There would be a further consultation before the plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate and it was hoped that it would be adopted in early 2015.

Members discussed the details of the consultation process. Councillor Dean thought that the consultation document should contain an explanation of the other options that the council had considered and why these had been rejected. He hoped the public would have the opportunity to put forward alternative locations.

The Assistant Director replied that this consultation was based on the council's preferred options. The other sites in the SHLAA had already been subject to consultation.

It was suggested that some amendments should be made to document's Forward, in particular to explain why the Council was required to provide the additional houses. It was also requested that wording of question two be looked at and there were other typographical errors that would need to be corrected.

The working group agreed the paper as the basis for further consultation on the Draft Local Plan.

LP21

UTTLESFORD LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The working group received the latest version of the Local Development Scheme (LDS), the project plan for the Uttlesford Development Plan.

The previous version, dated September 2012, had envisaged that the Local Plan would be adopted in February 2014 but delays with the Highways Assessment had meant that this had not been achieved. The Local Plan was now expected to be adopted in February 2015. As a consequence, the timetable for the adoption of the Gypsy and Traveller site allocations had been put back and was now planned for March 2016.

The main change to the document was the need for consultation on the additional sites required as a result of the revised housing numbers and the need for additional sites. A further amendment was to remove the provision for the production of a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) following a decision by the Cabinet that no further work should be carried out on this matter.

Councillor Barker said this document highlighted the amount of work carried out behind the scenes in preparing the evidence base and the development management policies, and she commended officers for all the work they had undertaken in preparing this document.

The revised LDS was noted.

.LP22

RETAIL MONITORING REPORT

The working group received a report that gave information on town centre uses within Uttlesford. This came from the 2012-13 survey of non-residential land, conducted by the ECC on behalf of the council. It monitored the planning permissions for non-residential use in the previous year, and the changes of the use of non-residential floor space over a threshold of 250sqm.

The report concluded that new opportunity area allocations were being put forward in the emerging local plan to meet the anticipated retail need in local centres and land had also been allocated for retail warehousing and large convenience shops. The number of vacant shops had increased, possibly due to the economic downturn and this trend would continue to be monitored.

Members asked about the council's strategy for the loss of shops and pubs to residential use and were advised of a recently published consultation that proposed greater flexibility for change of use. This was not presently a major issue in the district but the draft local plan made provision to protect and enhance the main centres.

The report was noted.

The meeting ended at 11.45am.