

LOCAL PLAN WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 2.00pm on 17 OCTOBER 2013

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

Also present: Councillors C Cant, R Chambers, R Eastham, J Loughlin, E Hicks, J Ketteridge, J Redfern and A Walters.

Officers in attendance: M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), R Harborough (Director of Public Services), A Lee-Moore (Principal Environmental Health Officer), S Nicholas (Senior Planning Officer), M Jones (Principal Planning Officer), H Hayden (Planning Officer) and A Taylor (Assistant Director Planning and Building Control).

Also in attendance: Mary Young (Essex Highways) and David Sprunt (ECC).

LP9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Rose.

LP10 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 August 2013 were approved and signed as a correct record, subject to an amendment to the final word of the last paragraph of minute LP5 to read 'Saffron Walden' instead of 'Cambridge'.

LP11 FUTURE HOUSING GROWTH REQUIREMENT

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control presented a report that considered the timeframe and scale of growth to be met in the new Local Plan.

He explained the background to the preparation of this report. Members were reminded that the Council was preparing a new Local Plan to replace the Adopted Local Plan 2005. In considering the basis of the new plan, the council had contributed to an Essex wide demographic study, which had looked at a number of growth scenarios and an average dwelling rate, and in 2012 had adopted the Economic Scenario as the most appropriate basis on which to develop the new Plan.

The Draft Local Plan was published for consultation in June 2012, with the provision of 9,870 new homes between 2001 and 2028 and the plan was expected to be adopted by the end of 2013. Further demographic projections

had subsequently been published and the scenarios were updated in the light of more up to date statistical data. At that time, it was considered appropriate to start the new plan from the end date of the previous plan to ensure there was continuous local plan coverage. Officers had been preparing a local plan with a plan period 2011 – 2026 based on 2 years at the RSS annual requirement of 430 dwellings per annum and 13 years at the economic scenario rate of 415 dwellings per annum, which made an overall requirement of 6255 dwellings.

The Assistant Director explained the significant factors that had come to light which now prompted a review of the housing numbers and the time scale for the plan.

Plan time scale

The local plan would not now be adopted until 2015 and this would have the effect of shortening the timeframe post adoption. In terms of national policy the NPPF stated that the plan should be prepared 'preferably over a 15 year period'. It had become increasingly clear from Planning Inspectors' comments at other authority's examinations that there was no discretion to deviate from this minimum time period. Legal advice had been sought and Counsel's unequivocal advice was that the 15 year period should be post-adoption.

The issue had also been discussed at an informal meeting with an Inspector, where a question had been asked as to whether there could be a short plan period with a commitment to review in 2015 or 2016 following the outcome of the Davies Commission report on Airport Capacity. The advice was that future airport strategy was too uncertain and not a strong enough argument for a shorter plan period.

- The advice was that the plan should cover the period 15 years from the anticipated date of adoption.

Scale of growth to be proposed in the Local Plan

It was clear from the NPPF and recent Inspectors' decisions that the Government was looking for authorities to increase housing growth. A plan based on the economic scenario was unlikely to be found sound by an Inspector because it was below the previous requirement of the Regional Plan and there was evidence that there was a greater need for housing.

There was clear Government advice that the plan should be based on the highest and most up to date figures from the DCLG and Office of National Statistics, this was the 2010 based SNPP. These projections were now seen as the most appropriate basis for planning growth in the district and would meet the district's objectively assessed need. This approach accorded with the National Planning Policy Framework in that it met household and population projections, taking account of migration and demographic change. Also, the SHMA demonstrated that in order to meet the Council's affordable housing need a housing requirement based on the trend based projection

provided the greatest amount of affordable housing. It was concluded that there were presently no legitimate reasons to vary the assumptions made in the official population and household projections and no reason why the council could not meet its objectively assessed need.

- For the Council to meet its objectively assessed need it should prepare a plan for 10,460 dwellings between 2011 and 2031. This would require the Council to identify additional sites for a further 2680 homes.

Members then discussed the content of the report.

In reply to a member question, it was confirmed that a number of the local authorities mentioned in the report faced similar issues and constraints and these were directly comparable to Uttlesford.

Councillor Watson was pleased that the report set out more realistic growth projections but felt that this advice could have come before members at a much earlier stage and that the current plan was not fit for purpose. Other members said that the large number of additional houses required should prompt a radical review to ensure the process gained acceptance by the public.

The working group expressed disappointment that the Government had gone back on its original statement, that local authorities would be able to set their own growth targets. Councillor Barker pointed out that this situation was not just affecting Uttlesford and many authorities would be required to revisit their plans, which would inevitably result in additions. She urged the working group to accept the advice in the report and get on with the preparation of the plan.

Councillor Rolfe commented that this was not a political issue as all national parties were committed to increasing housing. There was no alternative but to accept the numbers. However it was wrong to say this report could have been prepared earlier as the council had only recently been advised of the preference for the SNPP projections.

The working group was interested in the Inspector's comments in relation to Maldon's recent examination, that infrastructure constraints such as schools and highways were unlikely to provide sufficient justification for not planning for objectively assessed needs for housing. Councillor Godwin said it was important to plan for a sustainable future, and large developments should only be put where there was sufficient capacity and in locations where there were fewer constraints.

Councillor Mackman said that the increase in the housing number could deliver a large settlement in addition to the dispersal option, which would help provide affordable housing across the district. He asked if it was possible to increase the housing requirement to facilitate this but was advised that the number must be based on the needs evidence base.

Members were reminded that this report was only concerned with the principle of housing numbers and the length of the plan period.

The working group agreed the following statements

1. A plan which is most likely to be found sound is one prepared in accordance with the NPPF which would be a plan with at least a 15 year time frame from adoption and based on our full objectively assessed need.
2. The working group notes that
 - a. The preparation of a plan on the economic scenario will not continue as this is highly likely to be found unsound.
 - b. The plan will be based on the 2010 based sub-national population projections.
 - c. The plan will be for at least a 15 year time frame from adoption.
3. The plan period will be 2011 – 2031 and will provide for 10,460 dwellings. This requires the Council to identify additional sites for about 2,680 homes.
4. The 5-year land supply requirement will be based on the objectively assessed need of 523 dwellings a year.

LP12

5 YEAR LAND SUPPLY UPDATE

The working group received a report for information on the degree to which the council was meeting its 5 year supply of land for housing. This was updated from the report to the meeting on 14th June to show the position as at the end of the last planning committee. The updated statement considered the supply of housing against the council's objectively assessed need based on the SNPP 2010 projections of 523 dwellings a year.

It was estimated that 2,295 dwellings would be built on committed sites within the 5 year period, whilst there was a requirement for 2,746 dwellings. This related to 84% of the requirement, leaving a shortfall of 451 dwellings. In view of this shortfall members were advised that the council still needed to consider sustainable development favourably in order to maintain a steady stream of housing supply.

Members asked questions on the detailed calculation of the figures. Councillor Barker noticed what appeared to be discrepancies between the figures in the report and the appendix but it was confirmed that the figures quoted in paragraph 12 were correct.

Councillor Loughlin was concerned that the statement that the council should look favourably on development amounted to predetermination. The Assistant Director replied that the NPPF presumption in favour of sustainable development was national policy, but the Planning Committee still had a duty to consider the merits of individual applications.

Members asked if it would be possible to provide a simple guide on the council's methodology for calculating the 5 year land supply, to assist explanation to the public. The Assistant Director said he could try to put something together but unfortunately there was no nationally agreed procedure. Officers were required to make the best assumption on when dwellings would come through the process and needed to know about each site in order to make this judgement. He explained that this process had been looked at in considerable detail, and information supplied by external sources had been taken on board. Officers were confident that the best advice was being provided.

The working group noted the report.

LP13

UTTLESFORD LOCAL PLAN HIGHWAY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Mr Sprunt from Essex County Council presented the report on the Highway Impact Assessment. The study had been commissioned to evaluate the Uttlesford Local Plan in terms of its likely impact and to identify any necessary mitigation measures. It assessed the existing situation in key locations and then looked at the implication of the local plan in highway terms on the A120 and M11 junction 8. Work had also been carried out into the likely impact of the proposed developments on air quality.

Mr Sprunt presented the main findings in the report and explained the mitigation measures proposed to enable the implementation of the draft plan developments in Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Newport. The report also considered the likely impact on the M11/Junction 8 and explained that additional studies would be required going forward.

Mr Sprunt said there would be a further report to confirm the air quality data. Officers were currently taking account of new and existing methodologies which used different assumptions, and additional consideration needed to be given to this issue.

Councillor Eden said that the measures proposed for Saffron Walden highlighted what had to be done in a small town to facilitate change. He was concerned that the proposals would sacrifice the nature of the town to cater for the car and felt that there must be better ways to develop. Councillor Watson added that the proposed one-way system was not workable, would add miles to his journeys over a year and could not be cost efficient. He was advised that none of the closure restrictions would come into force until the new link road was provided. The cost of the road would be met by the developer.

Councillor Rolfe said that most of the mitigation measures in Saffron Walden appeared to depend on the new link road. He would like to understand the likelihood of the road being developed and was concerned that there could be a difficult interim period when some of the houses had been built but the road

had still not been provided. The Assistant Director explained that this assessment was for 880 additional houses, of this number some sites had already come forward leaving approximately an additional 500 houses to be provided, taking into account the schemes currently submitted. A development of this size would have to be acceptable to highways in any event. Mr Sprunt added that if there was a need for measures prior to the development the County could look at forward funding.

Members mentioned development proposals for adjoining districts and whether these had been taken account of in the study. Mr Sprunt replied that background growth was already taken into account in the modelling, as were existing commitments, but proposals were not, to the extent that they would result in a higher level of growth. Meetings were regularly held with neighbouring authorities to discuss cross border highway issues.

In answer to a question from Councillor Menell, it was confirmed that sustainable transport options, including footways and cycle links had been included within the schemes. She was also advised of work on cycleway projects that was on going in the district.

Councillor Barker commented that following the report on housing numbers earlier in the meeting, the local plan would require further housing allocations. These would be subject to a highway assessment and she raised concern at the possible delay in obtaining this information. Mr Sprunt said that as a result of this study the main information had been programmed into the system, so he would expect to provide the report in a more reasonable time period.

The working group noted the report.

.LP14

UTTLESFORD LOCAL PLAN REPORT OF REPRESENTATIONS

The working group received the report of representations on the strategic housing policies SP5 and SP6 and the site allocations. This was the final version of the report following the June/July 2012 consultation and had now been updated upon receipt of the Highway Impact Assessment.

Members commented that a number of sites in the document had already received planning permission. The Assistant Director said these would remain in the plan if consent had been granted but the development had not yet been completed. All sites required during the plan period would be referenced in the document.

A question was asked on the progress of the gypsy and travellers study. It was reported that the first draft of the traveller assessment had been received and was with the relevant districts for checking. It was hoped that suggested sites might be brought forward in the spring.

Councillor Cheetham mentioned policies in relation to health care provision. Following recent changes to the NHS, this was a complex issue which, she suggested, could be a topic for a future planning committee workshop.

The report was noted.

LP15

DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

The next meeting would be held on Friday 1 November at 9.30am.

The meeting ended at 11.00 am.