

PLANNING POLICY WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.00pm on 27 JULY 2015

Present: Councillor H Rolfe - Chairman
Councillors S Barker, P Davies, A Dean, S Harris, J Lodge, A Mills, J Parry and E Oliver.

Also present: Councillors D Jones, S Morris, V Ranger.

Officers in attendance: M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), S Nicholas (Senior Planning Policy Officer), M Paine (Planning Policy Team Leader), J Pine (Planning Policy/ Development Management Liaison Officer), A Taylor (Assistant Director Planning and Building Control), A Webb (Director of Finance and Corporate Services).

PP16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Loughlin.

PP17 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2015 were received, approved and signed by the Chairman, subject to an amendment to the heading in minute PP10 to read 'towards a vision for 2033'.

Councillor Dean said that in the final paragraph of minute PP12, he had commented in relation to the officer/member relationship that this was a two way process and officers should be equally open and objective.

PP18 PRESENTATION BY THE PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE

Adam Dodgshon – Principal Consultant from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) gave a presentation on the role of District Councillors and the Local Plan. The presentation set out the policy context, the key issues and the councillors' role in the process.

He drew members' attention to a recent Ministerial statement which required all local planning authorities to produce a plan by early 2017. This would have implications for the local plan timetable.

Members asked the following questions

- How could the council be confident in its housing number when there were frequent changes to the relevant guidance? The Inspector had added 10% to the UDC figure at the recent examination in public, and there could be a

similar situation with the new plan if there was new advice published between the date of the plan submission and the next examination.

In response Mr Dodgshon said there were a number of factors for the authority to take into account, including population figures, household projections and market signals. It was not an exact science but the planning authority was required to demonstrate at the examination that the information had had been considered and that any new figures had been taken into account.

- Did the PAS produce a simplistic tool that advised the public around the assessed housing need, plan preparation and what local councils were required to do?

Mr Dodgshon said there was no central resource but thought it would be useful for the local council to prepare a simple explanatory leaflet that set out the issues and the process.

- In relation to the five year land supply, would the Inspector accept a lower figure for the early stage of the plan if the council opted for a single site option and the development was backloaded to the later part of the plan period?

Mr Dodgshon said he was aware that this concept was currently being tested at examination and the outcome was awaited, but in any event the council would need to have very strong evidence for the proposed strategy.

The Leader thanked Mr Dodgshon for attending the meeting.

PP19

PREPARING A JUSTIFIED LOCAL PLAN

The working group received a report which followed on from the early discussion of the options stage methodology that was agreed at the last meeting. The report set out a number of broad mapped areas of search, which had been generated through the agreed five high level criteria. The council would investigate all of these through the Local Plan process and the proposed approach would ensure that there was a clear audit trail of decisions and a proper justification of why some sites were taken forward and other options were rejected. The areas of search were not limited by proposals from landowners.

The report also proposed eight scenarios for various levels of development for public consultation in the autumn. This would form the basis of the first stage of the sustainability appraisal consultation alongside the areas of search.

Public speaking

Councillor Derek Jones, Jackie Cheetham and Christina Cant spoke in relation to this item and raised issues including; consultation with parish councils and the public, key village designation, the 5 year land supply and the suitability of development within the broad areas for search. A summary of the statements is attached to these minutes.

The Planning Policy Team Leader made the following points in response to the speakers' comments

- The council was mindful of the need to consult with parish councils. A forum had been arranged for 28 September 2015. Thought would be given to how to consult the community in a meaningful way bearing in mind the available resources in the planning policy team.
- There would be a wide range of views feeding into the process so it was important to manage the responses. An engagement plan would be brought to the next meeting.
- The 'areas of search' was a framework to enable the issues for those areas to be explored. There would be other constraints identified during the process, but at this early stage the council was not jumping to conclusions but considering the evidence for all the sites.
- It was premature to say that a new settlement was the way forward when sites were still coming forward and the council was at an early stage of the process.
- It was confirmed that the council still had a 5 year land supply.

Members welcomed the report and the proposed process and hoped that the maps would stimulate public debate. Other possible areas of search were discussed.

Councillor Lodge referred to the areas of search for Saffron Walden, a large proportion of which was within one landownership. He asked whether the council would make an approach to the landowner if an appropriate site was identified. It was explained that the consultation was expected to generate submissions. However, if after looking at the evidence, there were insufficient sites identified as deliverable there could be discussion with the relevant landowners.

The Chairman said that the report set out a helpful way forward, and highlighted the following actions that had arisen from the discussions.

- Consider the potential for an additional area of search in the area around Sawbridgeworth/Junction 7a of the M11.
- Communicate the information about the broad areas of search to the town/parish councils.
- Consider the wording of the report relating to Green Belt around the villages.
- Consider the possibility of arranging a Member workshop for early September.

AGREED that the report be supported, and any comments on the contents of the document be supplied to the planning policy team prior to the next working group meeting and public consultation later in the autumn.

The working group received the scoping report which was the first stage of the process of preparing the sustainability appraisals and set out the baseline data

and sustainability criteria against which the alternative options would be appraised. The scoping report would be subject to consultation with the statutory bodies.

The purpose of a sustainability appraisal was to improve the quality of the Local Plan by assessing its policies and proposals in a consistent and transparent manner and testing them against alternatives. It was an essential part of the Local Plan process and was produced in parallel with the Local Plan. The first sustainability appraisal using the proposed criteria and framework would be in relation to the areas of search and scenarios.

Members questioned whether there was a set of criteria by which sites could be assessed. It was explained that the assessment was not scientific but a case of balancing the issues and to see how each area scored against different objectives. PAS consultants had offered to look at the document and pending this it was considered to be a robust framework. The appraisal would be used for the different stages of the plan.

The Leader asked officers to look at whether it would be possible to include an additional stage of consultation within the timetable, between the consultation on the broad areas of search and the specific sites allocations.

AGREED that the draft scoping report is published for consultation in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement.

PP21

APPROACH TO LOCAL PLAN TRANSPORT ASSESSMENT

Members considered a report, which explained the basic principles that the council would need to follow in building up its transport evidence to support the preparation of a new plan. The transport evidence base should identify opportunities for encouraging a shift to more sustainable transport and highlight the necessary infrastructure requirements.

The report set out the context of national policy and guidance, explained the existing transport assessments, comments raised by the Local Plan Inspector, and the benefits of appointing an independent transport advisor.

It was noted that the VISUM transport model used for the previous plan did not apply the same level of coverage in the north of the district. This was because it had initially been focused on the M11 junctions 7 and 8 assessment. Members said it was important to have consistent information across the district and acknowledged that additional modelling might be required.

The working group was aware that the previous plan had been delayed by the highways studies and hoped that the current work would be completed in a timely manner. It was also good practise for a transport infrastructure solution to be agreed for a site before it was taken forward into the Plan.

AGREED that the suggested approach be supported.

PP22

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND THE LOCAL PLAN

The working group considered a report which proposed that the UDC should ask parish councils whether they proposed to prepare a neighbourhood plan for their area. Neighbourhood development plans differed from parish plans as once they were adopted they gained the same weight in the consideration of planning applications as local plans. To start the process of preparing a plan, the parish councils would be asked to submit a Neighbourhood Plan Area Designation by the end of 2015.

Some parish councils were concerned about the level of commitment and resources involved, so the guidance aimed to assist them by explaining the benefits to the parish councils and process involved. The parish council liaison meeting on 28 September would provide an opportunity to discuss this further.

Members asked a number of questions about the status of a neighbourhood plan and the possible conflict between the district and parish councils' plans. It was stressed that it was important for there to be an early discussion to address the strategic issues through the whole area and for the neighbourhood plan to be consistent with the local plan.

The working group was advised of the resources that were currently available to provide assistance to the parish councils. It was confirmed that so far six neighbourhood areas had been submitted and agreed but no plans had yet been adopted.

AGREED that the report be supported as a basis for approaching Parish Councils regarding their intentions in respect of the preparation of Neighbourhood Development Plans aligned with the emerging Local Plan.

PP23

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday 14 September 2015 at 7.00pm. It was noted that there was the potential for the meeting to be rescheduled to a date later in September, dependent on publication of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA).

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Jackie Cheetham

Mrs Cheetham said the mapped areas of search could lead to the public jumping to conclusions about development. She asked whether the council still had a 5 year land supply and how it would turn down speculative applications. She said there were other development constraints such as SSSI and green belt that would need to be taken into account. She asked officers to look again at the key village designation as in many cases the infrastructure had not kept pace with development. She said it was very important to consult with the parish councils and thought that there should be additional meetings organised in different locations across the district. It was important to get early sign up by the local groups given the tight timetable for producing the plan.

Councillor Derek Jones

Councillor Jones explained the reason why a number of sites within the Takeley area of search were unsuitable for development and asked for them to be rejected now. He thought there was opportunity for cross border development near junction 8 and suggested a joint up approach with Epping Forest DC. He raised the issue of lack of school places in his area.

Christina Cant

Mrs Cant said the prospect of a new settlement was something unknown to the district. She therefore thought it was important that there was face to face consultation with district residents.