

**PLANNING POLICY WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 23 FEBRUARY 2016 at 7.00pm**

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

Officers in attendance: M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), R Fox (Planning Policy Team Leader), R Harborough (Director of Public Services and Interim Head of Paid Service), H Hayden (Planning Officer) and A Taylor (Assistant Director Planning and Building Control).

PP54 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Davies, J Lodge and J Loughlin.

PP55 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2016 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

PP56 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute PP44 – Business Arising

In response to a question, officers confirmed that the terms of reference and tender details for the Highway and Transport Strategy had been circulated to all Members following the meeting.

(ii) Minute PP46 – Local Development Scheme

Councillor Dean was concerned that the working group's meetings were operating without formal procedure rules and asked that consideration be given to adopting suitable guidelines.

(iii) Minute PP47 – Statement of Community Involvement

Councillor Dean referred to the draft assessment of sites that had recently been published on the council's website. He was concerned that only parish/town councils and site promoters had been asked to comment. As a number of new sites had come forward, he felt that there should be wider opportunity for comment, for example from the Neighbourhood Plan groups.

The Planning Policy Team Leader said the purpose of this exercise was to receive comments on matters of fact and to update the assessments if necessary. It was not appropriate to comment on the merits of the

sites at this stage. He would however ensure that the Neighbourhood Plan groups had the opportunity to feed their comments through the parish councils.

PP57

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Mr Ken McDonald spoke to the meeting about the SHMA document. A full copy of his statement is attached to these minutes. His major concern centred around the figure of 568 houses a year quoted in the document. He questioned the methodology and assumptions behind the SHMA and was concerned that the council was rushing through the Plan preparation without full consideration of the figures.

In reply he was informed that the consultants had attended the last meeting of the working group and had explained the methodology used. The consultants were expert in their field and their methodology had been supported by Inspectors at examination.

The Chairman acknowledged that it was critically important for the figures to be correct. The council would follow Government guidance and cross check the numbers before submitting the plan.

PP58

NEW SETTLEMENT OPTIONS FOR THE LOCAL PLAN

The Planning Policy Team Leader presented a report on a new settlement option for the Local Plan. The report set out the advantages and disadvantages of a new settlement and the background to new settlements in Uttlesford, particularly in relation to the withdrawn Local Plan.

The report asked the working group to provide a steer on its approach to the concept of new settlements and whether this option should be taken forward in the Plan preparation. This would then be discussed at Cabinet and a decision made at the Extraordinary Council meeting on 21 March 2016.

Confirmation that the council was not ruling out a new settlement option would prevent officers wasting a lot of time in preparation and provide certainty for Members and the public. It would then form part of a basket of measures for further work by officers. In the summer the working group would consider a range of development strategies, including a preferred option, but without identifying sites. Once the direction of travel had been agreed, officers would come back to the working group with site specific options.

Councillor Parry questioned the purpose of the report as she thought any decision should come from an evidence led process. However, it appeared that officers were seeking clarity that the council wanted all options to be considered and this was a sensible way forward. In answer to her question, it was confirmed that the Council could decide not include single a settlement(s) options but it would have to give very clear reasons for its decision.

Councillor Dean said it was too early to rule out any development options without the evidence base being completed. The report before Members recommended that 'a new settlement option be considered seriously' but as far as he was concerned all the options were important at this stage. He said a new settlement(s) should not be considered in isolation, and there were still outstanding planning appeals for major developments in the district that could have an effect on this decision. He put forward a form of words, which he thought would address what was required and this was endorsed by the working group.

The working group RECOMMENDED to Cabinet and Full Council that a new settlement (or settlements) should continue to be investigated and analysed alongside all other possible options for housing and employment distribution and should not be dismissed at this stage from the potential options for inclusion in the Local Plan.

The working group said it was very important that all council members understood the process and urged attendance at the Local Plan briefing prior to the council meeting on 25 February 2016.

PP59

ISSUES AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION – SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS

The working group received the summary of representations to the first part of the issues and options consultation. The remaining questions would be summarised at the next meeting. The Chairman thanked officers for their work in collating the report.

The working group discussed some of the main issues that had been raised in the consultation responses.

Councillor Dean asked how this report would be taken forward, and in particular how to accommodate Members' role in putting forward residents' views. He suggested there was a need for member/officer dialogue and a mechanism for facilitating this.

The Planning Policy Team Leader said that Members would have the opportunity to consider the responses to the questions in more detail during the next few months when they were considering the relevant reports.

The working group NOTED the report.

PP60

LOCAL PLAN INDICATIVE WORK PROGRAMME

The working group received an indicative work programme for the emerging Local Plan which set out the key processes and timeframes for getting the Local Plan in place by the end of 2017.

It was appreciated that this was an opening document for discussion, but the working group was not satisfied with the level of detail and felt the timeline

provided was too simplistic. Members would like to see a more detailed project plan as this was essential for the process to succeed. It would be helpful to know, for each constituent part - how far it was through the process, whether it was on target, the date it would be considered by the working group and the interdependencies with other studies. This would help to anticipate any possible delays.

The Planning Policy Team Leader said that there were detailed spreadsheets with charts, targets and milestones behind all the studies. However, there was a lot of detail and pulling this information together into a report for members would be time consuming. It was a question of making the best use of resources and balancing the work required on the plan preparation with Members' need for information.

The Chairman said he was confident that that Planning Policy team had a very clear picture of the programme and what was required but he also understood the working group's desire for a more detailed project plan.

Action: The Chairman would speak to officers about a possible way forward.

A question was asked about the apparent urgency to submit the Plan by the end of March 2017. It was explained that the Government had indicated the possibility of intervention and/or sanction after that date. The Government had recently issued a consultation document on this issue, which would be brought to the next meeting.

In answer to a question, the Planning Policy Team Leader said that work currently continuing on evidence base. There would be a paper on development strategies in June, and in September options for specific sites around the preferred the strategy. It was not yet clear how many sites would be found unsuitable during the early stages of the process.

Members asked about opportunities for public involvement and were informed that there would be a series of public meetings in the autumn prior to the public consultation at the end of the year. It was noted that there were only two months to deal with the consultation responses before the submission of the Plan. Members were informed that a summary of representations would be prepared and this would be submitted to the Inspector to be taken into account alongside the other evidence.

PP61

RESPONSE TO BASILDON LOCAL PLAN

The working group was informed that Basildon Borough Council had recently published its draft local plan for consultation. In relation to the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Strategy, it had stated that it was not able to find sufficient sites to meet its identified need. It proposed to meet this through the Duty to Cooperate and had contacted other Essex authorities with this request for assistance.

Members AGREED with the proposed response that Uttlesford is currently unable to find sufficient gypsy and traveller sites to meet its own needs and

therefore does not have an overprovision of sites to assist Basildon in meeting its needs.

PP62 **DUTY TO COOPERATE**

Members were given an update on recent Duty to Cooperate work.

The Leaders of the four authorities had lobbied the Government about the key strategic transport priority of the M11 Junctions 7, 7A and 8 and a positive reply had been received.

In answer to a question, it was explained that DTC links were being maintained with South Cambs but it was currently focused on its Local Plan examination.

PP63 **PLANNING POLICY WORKING GROUP – FORWARD PLAN**

Members received a list of the key studies and reports to be considered by the working group over the next few months. The working group meeting dates were agreed as follows – 9 June, 19 July, 23 August, 13 September, 25 October and 28 November 2016.

It was clear that some of the reports to be considered would generate significant public interest and it might be necessary to arrange additional meetings to accommodate these discussions.

The meeting ended at 8.40pm.

Good evening.

My name is Ken McDonald. I have lived in Uttlesford for 35 years.

I have no loyalty or leaning to any political party.

As there are quite a few facts quoted in this statement I will give each of you a copy.

There seems to have been little progress on following up the concerns I expressed to you three months ago about the robustness of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment" (the "SHMA"), despite your assurances.

May I remind you that you have not yet adopted the SHMA, yet all the talk is of its target of 568 houses a year. In fact, since "Business Arising" in the minutes of the meeting on 16th December, which recorded that ORS Consultants would be invited to explain the methodology and assumptions behind the SHMA, the SHMA has disappeared from view and there appears to be no record of any discussion of the consultants' presentation in January.

I note also that the various references I made to the SHMA in my response to the Issues and Options consultation have not appeared in the Summary of representations that you are due to consider this evening – in fact I failed to identify any of my considered responses – why did I bother? It is as if this group and the Local Plan process are paying only lip service to having any interest in other views.

Let me reiterate the concluding comment I made in November – that the SHMA proposal is for Uttlesford to increase its housing stock by **37%** over 22 years whilst the other districts in the SHMA are being asked to grow much less - between **16%** and **28%**. You will have seen the recent analysis by Chartered Accountant, Mike Young – showing that this 37% is higher than almost every other district in England. Having looked in some detail at the SHMA and the consultants' slides, I can find no explanation of their bizarre conclusion. Surely, you cannot continue to plan on the basis of a figure without understanding how and why it has been derived!

Paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6 of the SHMA state that the projection by the Department for Communities and Local Government is for an overall increase in the number of households in England as a whole of **23%** over the **25** years to 2037. Uttlesford's 'target' growth of **37%** over only **22** years is almost double the national annual rate. The consequence for Uttlesford is equivalent to an extra town bigger than Dunmow.

There is clearly something wrong.

I am concerned that this group has taken the view that the over-riding priority is to complete the series of tasks - to tick all the boxes – without questioning. I am concerned that your mindset is that there is no time to consider whether the outcomes of those tasks are realistic, no time to consider other views, and, perhaps worst of all, no time to consider the effect on Uttlesford and its residents.