

PLANNING POLICY WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 12 JULY 2016 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillor H Rolfe – Chairman
Councillors S Barker, P Davies, A Dean, J Lodge, J Loughlin and
A Mills

Officers in attendance: R Fox (Planning Policy Team Leader), G Glenday (Assistant Director Planning) and P Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager)

PP14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Harris, Oliver and Parry.

Councillor S Barker declared her interest as a member of Essex County Council.

PP15 LOCAL PLAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Chairman welcomed members and introduced Gordon Glenday as the newly appointed Assistant Director of Planning.

The report contained a number of options and a recommendation. Once agreed that recommendation would be submitted to Cabinet and then to Full Council. The intention was to adopt a distribution strategy for the Local Plan but not at this stage to consider sites. A workshop had already taken place to explain the process for the adoption of a distribution strategy and this had been attended by many members. A degree of uniformity about the position to be adopted had already been achieved.

The Planning Policy Team Leader presented the options set out in the report. He summarised the reasons for withdrawal of the previous plan following concerns expressed by the planning inspector. The aim was to make the Local Plan evidence based, robust and able to withstand scrutiny so to ensure there could be no questioning of the process.

The Council had already confirmed that a new settlement would not be ruled out and this was included in the mix of options being considered. He now intended to build upon the momentum achieved at the workshop proceeding to the call for sites taking account of the SHMA and SHLAA studies, the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, the Green Belt Review and the Countryside Protection Zone. There was also employment, retail and transport evidence to consider.

He reviewed the number of new homes to be allocated over the plan period and this had been rounded to 4,600. New projections for housing need were becoming available all the time and flexibility would need to be included within the plan.

He took members through the factors that had shaped the Council's thinking, reviewed the perceived advantages and disadvantages of a new settlement and looked briefly at garden city principles.

The presentation next considered each of the five options to be considered. In summary, these were:

1. All development allocated in new settlement(s)
2. All development pepper potted in villages
3. All development in the two main towns
4. Combination of development in main towns and villages
5. Hybrid involving new settlement(s), main towns and villages

The recommendation was to adopt a hybrid distribution strategy and he explained the reasons why that option was being put forward as the preferred strategy. A hybrid strategy was seen as the soundest and most sustainable approach, was considered to be deliverable, and could incorporate a contingency plan to accommodate extra housing if needed.

The next steps were to report to Cabinet on 14 July and to Council on 26 July.

The Chairman invited members to comment and ask questions of the Planning Policy Team Leader. Among the specific questions raised were:

- What would be a realistic contingency number to include?
- What would the impact be of the outstanding planning appeals?
- The need for updated assessments to be obtained and taken into account.
- The process needed to incorporate infrastructure provision as part of a new settlement development.
- Whether either one or two new settlements might be developed and whether more than one developer would be involved.
- The likely annual rate of housing growth and the impact on the five year land supply.

Councillor Barker informed members that two duty to co-operate meetings had taken place with East Hertfordshire and Epping Forest councils. She considered it would be necessary to build in a contingency provision and said the outcome of the outstanding appeals would become a vital consideration in planning site locations.

The Chairman commented that he had written to Sir Alan Haselhurst MP demanding an outcome from the two appeals lodged with the Secretary of State. His intention was to provide for the lowest number of houses that could be justified.

He stressed that parish councils would take a leading role in the site provision process as they would be asked to give a strong indication of where they wanted the housing to be located. He said it was imperative that the requirements of local communities were met in terms of sustainability and the provision of social housing.

The planning for new roads, schools and health centres would be more difficult to achieve. However, he emphasised that if the decision was taken to pursue one or more new settlements, this should be approached by using garden city principles.

Councillor Dean proposed that any decision to adopt option 5 should be accompanied by a caveat not to neglect infrastructure provision in existing communities so that a viable fall-back position was always available.

After further discussion, the Chairman then went through each of the five options in turn to establish the level of support for each one. It was clear at this point that options 1-3 had no member support at all. Option 5 had full member support. Option 4 had support from a majority of members present as a potential fall-back position subject to a number of conditions.

He proposed to recommend to Cabinet and then to Council the adoption of option 5, subject to a number of stipulated conditions summarised as follows:

1. Existence of a five year land supply
2. The required building rate to be maintained
3. Infrastructure in existing towns and villages to be enhanced wherever possible
4. Garden city principles to be used in any new settlement development and suitable funding streams utilised

The proposal was approved unanimously.

It was then proposed to vote on adopting option 4 as a fall-back position only if it became impossible to proceed with option 5.

This proposal was approved with only Councillor Lodge voting against.

It was therefore AGREED to recommend to Cabinet the following policy:

The preferred strategy for the Local Plan is Scenario 5 (Hybrid Distribution Strategy – New Settlement(s), Main Towns and Villages), as attached at the Appendix to the report, and that contingency is built into the Plan to allocate further homes if necessary;

the following conditions are stipulated as part of the adoption of Scenario 5:

- that a five year land supply is available;
- the required building rate can be maintained;
- infrastructure in existing towns and villages will be enhanced and taken into account in planning developments wherever possible; and
- Garden City Principles will be used and application made to Government for funding

Scenario 4 (Combination of Development in Main Towns and Villages) will become the fall-back position if Scenario 5 cannot be adopted, but only in the circumstance that it becomes impossible to proceed with New Settlement(s).

The meeting closed at 8.20pm