

**PLANNING POLICY WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES  
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 13 SEPTEMBER 2016 at 7.00pm**

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

Officers in attendance: M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), R Fox (Planning Policy Team Leader), A Gilham (Principle Policy Planner), G Glenday (Assistant Director Planning) and S Wood (Planning and Housing Policy Manager).

PP24

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dean, Davies and Harris.

Councillor Barker declared her interest as a member of ECC.

PP25

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 August 2016 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

PP26

**BUSINESS ARISING**

**(i) Minute PP23 – Local Plan Timetable**

In answer to a question from Councillor Lodge, officers said they would confirm the date when the Air Quality Action plan would be considered by the working group.

PP27

**LETTER FROM COUNCILLOR LODGE REGARDING THE DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY**

The working group received a copy of a letter that Councillor Lodge had sent to the Leader raising a number of issues around the Local Plan distribution strategy, the preparation timescale and process. The document set out officer's response to the various questions and Councillor Lodge's further comments.

Councillor Lodge highlighted the main issues in his letter. He was concerned about the lack of available evidence to make an informed decision on the spacial strategy. He questioned how officers had arrived at the indicative numbers, in particular the housing numbers for Great Dunmow and Saffron Walden. He felt that there was insufficient time within the plan preparation timetable to do this exercise properly.

Cllr Rolfe said the council's decision on the distribution strategy had included an element of dispersal. This was important for the council to maintain a 5-year land supply, something that had proved to be important at recent appeal decisions. He said there had been a positive response from town and parish councils to the recent letter about possible development sites. All the evidence was being put together systematically and would be in place when the Plan was submitted.

The Planning Policy Team Leader confirmed that the evidence base was nearly complete. All the studies had been commissioned but no allocations would be made until the work was finalised. The numbers set out in the letter to the town/parish councils were indicative but the split of 60/30/10 between single site, main towns and villages was considered to be a logical and reasonable way to proceed.

Councillor Lodge said there was no evidence behind the 750 houses proposed for Saffron Walden and no alternatives suggestions had been put forward. He said any future larger scale development in Saffron Walden would require a workable traffic plan but this had not yet been addressed in the Transport Study. He thought the proposed link road would serve little purpose, it was an east – west link that was required to enable access to facilities.

The Chairman said there was a need for additional housing in Saffron Walden, particularly for affordable units. He also pointed out that Saffron Walden had taken a lower percentage of housing than other areas of the district. Councillor Lodge said that any option for development should be workable and sustainable.

Councillor Lodge said that Braintree DC had decided to delay its Local plan submission by two months and asked if this was an option for Uttlesford. The Assistant Director Planning reminded the working group that the DCLG had given a clear steer that the Plan should be submitted by the end of March 2017, and whilst this was a decision for Members, there would be risks in delaying the submission.

The Planning Policy Team Leader said he would reply fully to Councillor Lodge's letter and a copy would be attached to the minutes of this meeting.

PP28

## FEEDBACK FROM MEMBER WORKSHOP

The Assistant Director Planning reported on the Member workshop on 7 September 2016. Members had received an update on the evidence so far, and how this fed into the various possible scenarios. There had also been a presentation on the Transport Study from the consultants and feedback on the town and parish councils' comments on the possible site allocations. The break out session had looked in more detail at the evidence and considered a SWOT analysis of the single settlement options. The Q&A session had helped officers to gauge Members' views on the various options.

He reported that the two appeals for the proposed large developments at Elsenham and West of Great Dunmow had been refused by the Secretary of State. However, the decision had highlighted a number of positives, which served to endorse the evidence for the next stage of the plan.

- The objectively assessed need (AON) for the district was acceptable.
- UDC was performing well in building new homes.
- UDC was able to demonstrate a five-year land supply.

Councillor Lodge said the workshop had been useful and produced some interesting ideas, and asked how this would lead into the next stage of the plan. Councillor Rolfe said the evidence should lead all the decisions and officers were still working on the evidence base. The next stage was to hold public exhibitions in Stansted, Saffron Walden and Dunmow. The next PPWG on 11 October would draw together all the strands and move towards some firm conclusions.

Councillor Loughlin was concerned that Members would be expected to make a decision at the Council meeting on 8 November when they had not been involved in the detailed discussion on the evidence. This was conceded, although all the information was publically available for any member to read.

It was suggested that group leaders should encourage their Members to attend the meeting on 11 October.

PP29

## TRANSPORT STUDY

The Principle Policy Planner updated members on the progress of the Transport Study. The consultants had presented a summary to the recent Member workshop but there was still further work to be done, including detailed work on Saffron Walden. He said the purpose of the study was to assist the preparation of the Plan, to address the Inspector's comments in relation to transport matters on the withdrawn Plan, and to consider the likely implications of the alternative options for the spacial distribution of development.

This was a strategic level document, which had not been in place for the previous plan process, but had been requested by ECC and Highways England and had been prepared in accordance with guidance and best practise.

Members asked when the Plan was likely be completed and whether the working group could receive a copy of the study findings so far. Officers said that a number of key highway authorities had yet to comment on the plan, which was the requirement of the Duty to Cooperate. Officers said they would look to get something to members as soon as possible.

PP30

## **UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL RETAIL STUDY UPDATE 2016**

The Principle Policy Planner presented the update report to the 2014 Retail Study. This was required to ensure that the latest information was available to inform decisions on the impact on retail centres, and that there was a town centre first approach in line with national policy. The study looked at retail provision up to 2016.

The study set out the district's current position and recommendations for future provision. Councillor Rolfe drew out the main conclusions, which centred on the difference between convenience shopping (everyday items) and comparison shopping (items not purchased on a regular basis). Both Great Dunmow and Saffron Walden required more convenience provision, but it was only Saffron Walden that had capacity for additional floor space for comparison shopping.

Councillor Rolfe reflected on the recent Waitrose refurbishment and the subsequent decline in footfall in Saffron Walden. He thought there might be an argument for another large operator to drive up visits to the town. Officers said there would have to be evidence of increased capacity but agreed to put this question to the consultants.

In answer to a question from Councillor Lodge, it was confirmed that the study had used the Local Plan population projections.

The Chairman said that the council wanted to encourage retail growth in the towns and would work collectively with town/parish councils and the town teams.

The working group NOTED the Retail Study update as part of the evidence base.

PP31

## **DRAFT LOCAL PLAN CHAPTERS**

The working group received the latest Strategic and Development Management Polices for inclusion in the new Local Plan. It set out proposed changes to the text and additional policies under a number of headings. There had been two member workshops that had looked in detail at the policies, and although the exercise was nearly complete there was still work to be done.

Members had a number of questions, and felt it would be helpful to hold a further workshop. It was agreed that this would be arranged and Members would be advised of the date.

PP32

## **PROJECT PLAN**

The working group received the latest version of the Local Plan project plan and risk register.

Councillor Parry said there were a number of reports shown on the plan for this meeting, which had not been considered tonight, and she was very concerned about any resulting slippage in the programme.

Officers apologised that the plan had not been updated but confirmed that the studies were still on track. An updated version of the plan would be circulated to all members.

## ACTION POINTS

PP26 - Air Quality Action Plan	To advise members when this would be considered by the working group
PP27- Letter from Councillor Lodge	To attach a copy of the officer's reply to the minutes
PP29 - Transport Study	To provide Members of the working group with a copy of the study.
PP31 - Draft Local Plan Chapters	To arrange a further member workshop.
PP32 - Project Plan	To circulate an updated version of the plan

## **Response to Councillor Lodge**

### **Distribution Strategy**

The indicative numbers for settlement types set out in the letter of 27 July were derived from the hybrid distribution strategy agreed by PPWG, Cabinet and Full Council.

The 2,800 figure for new settlement(s) was based on likely build out rates. This left approximately 1,800 homes to be provided at the towns and villages. Given the relative scale of the towns compared with key villages and type A villages, the need to sustain services and provide appropriate infrastructure etc. it was logical that between 600-750 dwellings be allocated in each of the towns; 30-70 in each of the key villages; and, 10-20 in each of the Type A villages.

Clearly, the final numbers for each settlement type will only be determined once specific allocations have been agreed by Members.

### **Potential Allocations**

The location of the new settlement(s) and allocations has not been predetermined or agreed. There will be a Member Briefing on 11 October before the opportunity for full debate at PPWG on 25 October and Cabinet on 26 October before a final decision is taken at Full Council on 8 November.

### **Sustainability Appraisal and Alternative Strategies**

A Sustainability Appraisal was commissioned at Issues and Options Stage last year. This considered similar potential distribution options to those debated in July this year. A further sustainability appraisal has been undertaken in respect of the potential allocations. The terms of reference for evidence base work such as this are generally a matter for officers.

### **Air Quality Management Area**

Essex County Council is undertaking traffic survey work. Further AQMA testing may be commissioned depending on the findings.

### **Employment Land Review**

There will be opportunities for Members to consider the employment allocations alongside housing allocations at the meetings referred to above.

### **Transport Study**

The transport study was commissioned in November 2015. Its findings were presented to the Member Workshop on 7 September. The terms of reference were not reported to PPWG as this was a technical officer matter.

### **Retail Study**

The retail study was commissioned in March 2016. Its findings were presented to PPWG on 13 September. The terms of reference were not reported to PPWG as this was a technical officer matter.

### **Water Cycle Study**

The refresh of the water cycle study was commissioned on 2 September. The terms of reference were not reported to PPWG as this was a technical officer matter.

### **Education Strategy**

Any formal education strategy is a matter for Essex County Council as education authority and will form part of the Schools Organisation Plan. We will continue to liaise with the County's Infrastructure Delivery Department over education and other requirements.