

**PLANNING POLICY WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 10 JANUARY 2017 at 7.00pm**

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

Officers in attendance: M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), R Fox (Planning Policy Team Leader), G Glenday (Assistant Director Planning), G Holmes (Planning Policy Officer) and R Harborough (Director of Public Services).

PP30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Davies.

PP31 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2016 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

It was agreed that a list of the actions arising from the meeting would be attached to the minutes. There had been no actions arising from the meeting on the 28 November.

PP32 COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)

Chris Bowden from Troy Consulting presented a report on the Infrastructure Levy (CIL). He explained that the CIL was a fixed levy on new development, which could be spent on infrastructure anywhere in the district and had been intended to largely replace Section 106 as a mechanism for securing contributions from development that would fund new infrastructure. As part of the development of the Local Plan, the Council had to consider whether to put in place a CIL charge or to continue to use just Section 106. This decision was now in the context of a more restrictive legal framework, which only allowed the pooling of up to five Section 106 agreements for any one infrastructure type or item.

This issue had been considered in 2014, when it had been concluded that there was insufficient justification to take forward a CIL charge. This was mainly because Section 106 could deliver the necessary infrastructure to support the delivery of the sites. However, the new emerging Local Plan was likely to propose a greater number of larger strategic sites. Also, the council was likely to breach the pooling limits in the near future, which could hinder the use Section 106 to secure contributions for future developments.

It was explained that the strategic sites were likely to pay CIL at a rate of £0/m² due to the high cost of on-site infrastructure provision. However, contributions

from other growth could be used to address these or any other infrastructure needs.

The report concluded that there was likely to be merit in putting a CIL charge in place. There would also need to be work to identify the infrastructure to support the strategic sites and how this could be secured through the Section 106 mechanism. A review of CIL had been carried out by a Government appointed expert panel and Members would need to consider the implications of this as well as any outcomes from the Government White Paper. The next step was to carry out further analysis of the funding and the infrastructure that could be brought forward by each option.

In answer to a question regarding the relationship between CIL and health provision, it was acknowledged that this was a complex area. Long term planning for health was only 3- 5 years compared to the longer period of the plan. It was important to update the infrastructure delivery plan and to improve consultation and engagement with the CCG.

The meeting discussed how the CIL would operate in practise and acknowledged the need to put in place governance and decision making principles to ensure the money was spent appropriately and also to prepare for the likely requirement for additional staff to run an effective CIL system.

The Chairman thanked Mr Bowden for this report. He said there would be a continuing dialogue on this issue with a view to making a decision when the evidence developed later in the process.

PP33

LOCAL PLAN EVIDENCE BASE - UPDATE

The Planning Policy Team Leader provided an update on the Local Plan evidence base, which set out the evidence that had been commissioned since the Local Plan pause. He said the status of all the studies was recorded on a master spread sheet and some of these studies might need to be revisited as they had now become out of date.

Nick Buhaenko-Smith spoke to the meeting concerning issues around the proposed site to the west of Braintree. A copy of his statement is attached to these minutes.

The Chairman thanked Mr Buhaenko-Smith for his comments and said these would be addressed as the plan progressed. He stressed the importance of having a clear project plan in place as soon as possible.

A question was asked about the highway testing and modelling for South Cambs and whether there had been a dialogue to understand the main concerns and how these might be mitigated to allow for the development of a strategic site.

Cllr Rolfe said there would be a member/officer meeting with South Cambs later in the week. This discussion was part of the specific work being done since the pause, which also included

- The future housing numbers for the district

- The A120 developments
- Saffron Walden and other alternative models
- Evidence in relation to the Great Chesterford site

The Planning Policy Team Leader said officers would be meeting with south Cambs and Cambridge City to discuss the details of the highway modelling requested by Cambridgeshire County Council on the implications of the potential development on the roads on both sides of the border.

Cllr Dean said there still appeared to be a lot of work to be done before the council was in a position to make a decision on any of the strategic sites. He asked for an assurance that the related meetings would be minuted to provide an audit trail.

In relation to the project plan, officers were looking at the evidence base in the context of the governance arrangements and the resulting timetable would form the basis of the updated Local Development Scheme.

The report was noted.

PP34

ACTION PLAN FOR THE LOCAL PLAN – UPDATE

The working group was advised that the report commissioned from IPE, through the Planning Advisory Service, on the progress of the Local Plan had now been received and officers' had prepared a draft action plan in response. The Scrutiny Committee had requested this report and would therefore consider it at the meeting on 17 January, but it was considered useful to have the views of PPWG at this stage.

The Assistant Director Planning said the recommendations were broadly in line with the work that was already being undertaken. This included considering an additional consultation and updating the Sustainability Appraisal. These issues would be discussed at the member workshop 1st February, as well as considering the 2016 housing figures for the SCHMAA authorities and the upcoming White Paper. The action plan also recommended updates to various studies and work on these was already underway.

In relation to the possible increase in housing numbers, members were informed that the neighbouring authorities Epping Forest and East Herts had submitted their plans based on a figure between the 2012 – 2014 AECOM projections. The Inspector had advised UDC that it should take the 2014 figure (14,100 dwellings) as a starting point and then test this figure.

Cllr Lodge reminded the group that UDC was still working to its existing housing number of 12,500 dwellings. He said the council's project plan was missing more significant work around the new settlements and he was concerned that UDC was falling behind its neighbours in working up plans. He understood that three councils in Essex had set up the overarching vehicle to deliver these sites and he would like assurance that work was going on in the background.

The Director of Public Services said that the reports from Braintree, Tendring and Colchester had deliberately separated the preparation of Local Plans from

the establishment of mechanisms to deliver the new settlements. It was appropriate to say in a local plan that the council was proposing the delivery of a strategic development in accordance with Garden settlement principles but not to select sites on the basis of the type of delivery vehicle, particularly if this was a council owned company. However, he said that credible delivery arrangements would support housing supply, which could be material. He said work was continuing on this policy area. There was the option for UDC to join the North Essex authorities' company structure to deliver garden communities if a proposal came forward in the west of Braintree area that included UDC land.

The Chairman said he recognised that there was a lot of work going on but to ensure visibility he would like the strategic sites to be specifically referenced in the Project Plan. He also requested that the Project Plan be circulated as soon as possible, to include a timetable with both a start and finish date. He expected the next meeting to have a more meaningful discussion on the issues raised.

PP35 EMPLOYMENT LAND TOPIC PAPER

The group received a paper which set out the current position on future employment growth in the district. The paper addressed how the need for future employment land had been identified, the current employment land, the future site provision and the next steps.

The findings had been based on a medium growth scenario of Stansted Airport achieving its target of 35mppa. It had been calculated that over the plan period there would be a requirement to provide 16,600sqm office space and 18ha of industrial land.

The report update recommended a total of 23 preferred sites that were potentially suitable. AECOM had been commissioned to undertake a detailed assessment of these sites and produce an addendum report which would also take account of the recently published East of England Forecasting model figures, which could have an impact on the future requirement.

In answer to a member question, it was explained that the growth scenarios, also took into account the East of England base line assumptions, which didn't include projections for Stansted Airport.

The report was noted.

PP36 UTTLESFORD PLANNING POLICY MEMBER FORUM

The Chairman put forward a proposal to establish a small member group to meet on a more regular basis to oversee progress of the action plan. It was suggested that this group could comprise group leaders (or their representative) plus the Cabinet member. They would report progress on any issues to their group members. He stressed that this was an advisory role, to consider issues in detail at an early stage before items were considered by PPWG.

Cllr Loughlin said she objected to this proposal as being undemocratic as she had expected all the Local Plan meetings to be public. The Chairman confirmed

that this arrangement was not a substitute for PPWG, but rather a case of operational efficiency and to ensure adherence to the timetable.

Cllr Dean said there hadn't been a clear project plan over the last year and members hadn't been adequately informed about the process. He therefore thought it was a good idea to consider a different approach, particularly given the enormous agenda which couldn't be discussed in detail at a formal meeting.

AGREED to recommend the establishment of a Planning Policy Member Forum.

PP37 REGULATION 18 CONSULTATION

The Chairman explained that the previous Local Plan timetable had not included a draft Local Plan consultation and it was now suggested that a programme be prepared that included a preferred options consultation as part of the Regulation 18 stage. This would give the public and other key stakeholders the opportunity to comment on the relative merits of the spatial strategy and policies, and allow time for any modification to the plan as a result of the comments received.

The previous guillotine of 31 March 2017 had been lifted, which would enable this additional consultation to take place. The DCLG was aware of the councils' programme of work and dialogue with officers was continuing.

Members supported this proposal as an opportunity to re-engage the public with the process.

AGREED to recommend the inclusion of a Regulation 18 draft Local Plan consultation stage in the revised Local Plan timetable (LDS).

The meeting ended at 8.30pm

Action points

PP33 – Local Plan evidence base	To make available the notes from meetings with neighbouring authorities concerning the strategic sites.
PP34 – Action Plan for the Local Plan	To include in the Action Plan reference to the work around new settlement options. To circulate an updated project plan to include both a start and finish date.
PP36 – Planning Policy Member Forum	To forward to Cabinet the recommendation to establish a Planning Policy Member Forum
PP37 - Regulation 18 Consultation	To forward to Cabinet the recommendation to include a Regulation 18 draft Local Plan consultation stage in the revised Local Plan timetable (LDS).

Public Speaker

Mr Buhaenko - Smith

Once again, thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of SERCLE. There are four topics I would like to address this evening.

The first is Garden Villages

Councillors are probably aware of the recent announcement by the government of a new batch of garden villages. You may not be aware that reading through various broad sheet papers both left and right of the political spectrum, both sides have been indicating the government seem to be putting their faith in smaller garden developments. Why?

- They are faster to build and will more likely assist the government in meeting it's housing targets. A 10,000+ house development will take a minimum of 4-5 decades to complete.
- The growing political backlash on what one paper stated as "War on the countryside" with senior Tory MPs and Ministers starting to speak out against building larger "Garden Cities".

Two papers, one being the Telegraph, also indicated that the PM's support for "Garden Cities" is waning and specifically support for the Ebbsfleet development is "quietly being scrapped".

The second topic is Lord Kerslake's report on Braintree District Council's Local Plan

Before I go any further I should state that the Lord Kerslake team that put together the report is very pro-development.

What was the result of their report? Currently all we can go on is the details released by the BDC press office. The press release highlighted the praise for the councils working together. As we all from experience, things can work well together but not the reach the right results. But behind this is the real point of the report i.e. insufficient evidence to support the chosen locations of development sites and the reasons behind the rejected sites. So what's the result - BDC delaying their local plan by up to 4-5months so they can strengthen their evidence.

The third is Land Delivery Vehicles

The third topic concerns the financial data to support the creation of the North Essex "New Town" LDVs. For the West of Braintree, the initial estimate of costs is nearly £900million and this is just for the BDC side of West of Braintree. SERCLE estimates the costs for UDC side would be in the region of £200-300million. These are initial estimates and from evidence of previous major infrastructure projects, that costs will rise. It will definitely not go down!

Allocation of costs is another area that should be a concern to UDC councillors. Using the other "new towns" as a benchmark, the costs for West of Braintree would be split equally between BDC, ECC and UDC. So, we may assume UDC's share of the costs towards the project could rise to £400million. Again, I reiterate these costs are an initial estimate.

But it's not just the projected costs. SERCLE have reviewed the maths and we believe that we've identified mistakes. They maths don't add up.

However, along with projected costs and maths that don't add up, is the alarming statement in the LDV report to BDC councillors:

In my experience from a career in investment banking, a statement like that would raise a red flag. I never came across a sensitivity test scenario that can project decades into the future with that level of confidence.

The last topic I would like to raise is on the subject of evidence on DtC

SERCLE notes that minutes from some DtC meetings are attached to this meeting agenda. That's is encouraging however may I remind the working group of a statement from the minutes of PPWG Nov 26 2015:

"Action: To circulate a timetable of future duty to cooperate meetings to all members of the working group and ensure that the minutes of these meetings were reported as soon as they were available"

SERCLE looks forward to seeing the minutes from UDC's meetings with BDC regarding the West of Braintree.

To summarise my points:

- It seems that government political support is waning for Garden Cities, instead emphasising the promotion of smaller, less politically charged garden communities
- It seems the pro-development, Kerslake report has found the evidence for the North Essex new towns to be "un-sound"
- The report to support the feasibility of the West of Braintree LDV is fraught with risk and the numbers do not add up
- The potential costs to UDC for West of Braintree are upwards of £400million with no guarantee that the ability to recoup the monies within a reasonable time frame? Could that be considered a sound return of investment?
- UDC's evidence for their DtC meetings with BDC is still outstanding

With these points in mind and the many other issues that the council will face, I would assume councillors will wish to discuss the question –

"Should we maintain the risks of development within our control and borders, and then assess feasibility of developing a "garden city" with BDC maybe in the next plan period?"

Letter from Cllr J Lodge agreed to be appended to these minutes:

Cllr John Lodge
Leader R4U

25th November 2016

Dear Gordon,

Planning Policy Working Group 28 November 2016

The agenda only went up during the course of 22 November 2016 – I don't know why it was late - and contains only 3 items of business – the Thaxted and Great Dunmow Local Plans and an update on the “Evidence Base” for the Local Plan, the report for which wasn't available until 23 November, and even then not all of the appendices are available.

Given the amount of work that needs to be done on the Local Plan, and the cancellation of the October 2016 PPWG meeting, I find this most surprising. There is a huge amount of business which should be coming before the PPWG, and yet there is only one item which relates directly to the preparation of the Local Plan. The “Evidence base – update” also raises its own issues on the process which UDC has followed which I refer to below.

I wrote ahead of the August 2016 meeting setting out my concerns at the plan process, the lack of evidence and the apparent pre-determination of the spatial strategy in July of this year, well before the bulk of the evidence base had been received. All of those concerns still remain, and indeed they have been heightened by the evidence that is now emerging, the fact that a lot of evidence is still to come, the lack of any proper engagement with neighbouring authorities on housing sites and the complete lack of any strategic plan or work schedule for completion of the Local Plan.

In particular I would like to discuss the following matters:

Spatial Strategy

I have asked repeatedly for evidence of the process by which the Spatial Strategy notified to town and parish councils on 27 July 2016 and re-affirmed to UDC councillors in the presentation given by officers on 11 October 2016 was arrived at, what reasonable alternatives were considered and where is the evidence base to justify the Spatial Strategy which is now being pursued.

In response to my letter tabled at the PPWG meeting on 23 August 2016 and discussed at the 13 September PPWG meeting, there has still been no proper explanation. In the response from Cllr Rolfe, he claimed that:

- The draft Strategy was only indicative. This appears not to be the case –
 - this draft Strategy appears still to be the only Strategy being contemplated. Although it is of course not final until adopted by the Council, I am unaware that any other Spatial Strategies are being contemplated – certainly none have been presented to the PPWG or to Councillors, and I am unaware of the existence of any. It was distributed widely on 27 July and re-affirmed on 11 October, and further re-affirmed to the press on 7 November;
 - the evidence base documents have clearly been commissioned on the assumption that only this strategy will be adopted. I refer to the new documents published by UDC on 23 November below, but for example the Transport Assessment puts this forward in 3 of the only 4 realistic strategies;

the updated Water Cycle Study which appeared only on 23 November (although dated 16 October 2016) has been prepared on the basis of this Spatial Strategy alone. I should be grateful for an explanation of when these instructions were given, and why only one Spatial Strategy is being considered?

- *“There will be a full inclusive discussion and debate of all potential allocations and the new settlement at PPWG, Cabinet and Council.”* – this response was given in August and yet despite repeated questioning and requests for information, there has been absolutely no information given on alternative spatial strategies;
- *“None of this can possibly be construed as predetermining housing distribution across the District”* – I don’t see what other conclusion one can reach however? There are no other proposals; nothing is being presented to this group or to Council. Moreover I am aware of Cllr Rolfe’s e-mails to Saffron Walden Town Council, which raised similar concerns, confirming that there is no Comparative Sustainability Assessment but that it would follow in due course – this is exactly the process of the evidence following the decisions already taken that I am so concerned about.

I note the responses set out in the draft minutes of the 13 September 2016 meeting, and in particular:

- Cllr Rolfe notes the need for the distribution strategy to include an element of dispersal. I fully accept this. However his response completely ignores the fact that there are some 9200 new homes still to be built during the Plan Period of which 4600 have already been allocated and every single one of those is dispersed. Even if every single one of the 4600 remaining new homes was allocated to a new settlement, the Local Plan strategy would still be a hybrid between dispersal and new settlement. There is a clear 5 year land supply going forwards because of the permissions already given, and no evidence has been produced to this group to indicate likely development profiles going forwards under any reasonable alternative spatial strategies. His response does not remotely justify the proposed spatial strategy;
- The Planning Policy Team Leader is quoted as saying that the 60/30/10 split proposed (although these percentages don’t seem to reflect the allocations presented to us) was logical and reasonable. That is not however the legal requirement. I should remind you again that the Council’s obligation is to identify the most sustainable spatial strategy having considered all reasonable alternatives, and based on the evidence – this has clearly not been done. There is no indication of what if any reasonable alternatives have been considered, and nor is much of the evidence available;
- Cllr Rolfe states that there is a need for affordable housing in Saffron Walden, but this is true of every part of the district. It also ignores the fact that 600 new homes have been approved in Saffron Walden but are unbuilt and that these should provide some 240 affordable homes;
- Finally Cllr Rolfe claims that Saffron Walden has taken a low percentage of housing than other parts of the district. I’m not sure whether or not this is correct, but it should be utterly irrelevant to the current process - this claim exemplifies one of the many faults of the process. Cllr Rolfe has for a long time said that Saffron Walden must take a large number of new homes, and Cllr Barker recently said that it must take “its fair share” – both of them have pre-decided the issue regardless of the evidence.

In my letter prior to the 23 August 2016 PPWG meeting, I expressed surprise that this strategy was proposed despite many of the key Evidence Studies being uncompleted, and indeed some of the key documents, such as the overall Transport Assessments, being at a very early stage of preparation.

In August I made the following request, to be: “provided with a list of reasonable alternative spatial strategy scenarios, a detailed assessment of each, and details of which will be the subject of comparative sustainability assessments, and why, and the timescale for their production.” No proper response was given. I also presented a number of alternative spatial strategies and said *“Clearly I could come up with other perfectly reasonable alternative scenarios. My aim is not to give an exhaustive list but to demonstrate that no such alternatives have ever been considered by the PPWG, no comparative sustainability work has ever been published, and as far as I am aware no alternatives have even been prepared. If I am wrong in any of this, I should be grateful if the Planning Team would provide the*

documents to me as a matter of urgency; I have copied Mr Fox into this letter, and would ask him to provide me with any such documents, or confirmation that no such analysis has yet been performed. If any such analysis has been prepared, please also provide the associated assessments of related impacts on, for example, education, health and transport impact and employment strategy." I have received no response at all to this request.

Lack of consultation with neighbouring authorities in relation to potential new settlement sites

As far as I am aware, there are only 3 realistic sites for the proposed new settlement(s) – Great Easton, west of Braintree and north of Great Chesterford. The latter two sites obviously raise cross-border issues with, respectively, Braintree and South Cambs districts, and as part of the Local Plan process this council should have been having frequent discussions with both Braintree and South Cambs district councils to identify the issues, the opportunities and the potential solutions raised by each of the sites.

Over the last year, Cllr Parry and I have regularly questioned the lack of information on the duty to co-operate that was presented to the PPWG, and expressed concern that this council appears to be completely failing in its duty to co-operate. We have requested details of the work that UDC has done with other councils, as have other councillors and local residents, but no positive response has been received. You will be aware that a recent EIR request for the relevant information was refused on the basis that the information was still in draft form. South Cambridgeshire District Council were however entirely happy to respond to a similar EIR request, and their response demonstrates the complete failure of this council to co-operate.

We do not know what the DTC discussions have been with Braintree, but given the lack of information presented to the PPWG, I rather assume they are lacking substance, and I assume exactly the same comments apply to the sites west of Braintree. The impression we have been given for the current delay in the plan process may well be attributed by issues with the relationship with Braintree District Council. I should be grateful therefore if you would confirm what discussions have been held and give us firm evidence of the work which has been carried out and the conclusions reached. I recently attended as the only UDC member a meeting held by Braintree DC to liaise with affected residents in West of Braintree area and it was most obvious that proper discussions had not taken place between BDC and UDC.

The South Cambs response also shows that their views were misrepresented to councillors here. We were expressly told that South Cambs had objected to the potential development north of Great Chesterford however from the documents supplied, it is clear that that is not the case; rather they have raised issues that need to be resolved, and have expressly offered to co-operate on the development of proposals.

The South Cambs response shows that co-operation has been effectively non-existent. The total co-operation consists of:

- An unminuted meeting between UDC and South Cambs officers on 24 November 2015;
- A response from South Cambs on 4 December 2015 to the UDC Issues and Options consultation. This noted that the site north of Great Chesterford raised issues, especially around transport capacity, which needed to be discussed, and welcomed such a discussion. No response at all was made by UDC, and no discussions have ever been held;
- On 7 October 2016, in response to a call from a UDC officer, South Cambs wrote noting the same need to talk and discuss issues that they had raised in December 2015;
- On 7 October 2016 South Cambs received a transport consultation request from UDC. I don't know what this consultation is as it has never been presented to the PPWG or indeed to the councillors, or as far as I

am aware mentioned as part of any of the officer presentations. I should be grateful if you would supply me with a copy of the consultation request.

That appears to be the sum total of UDC's efforts to determine whether or not the land north of Great Chesterford should be a preferred site for the Local Plan. Given the lack of evidence, it is obviously impossible to come to any conclusions on its strengths or weaknesses, and it is amazing that officers felt they could prepare a points-based analysis of it in comparison with the other sites.

I note that the agenda for the 28 November 2016 meeting does not even include any discussions on the DTC or what discussions the Council should be having with neighbouring authorities!

Side-lining of the PPWG

I complained in my August 2016 letter at the side-lining of the PPWG, and yet nothing has changed – indeed the immediate response was to cancel the October 2016 meeting. Can you explain what role you actually believe the PPWG has been constituted to perform, as it appears to be being side-lined from the role I had understood it should perform. I should repeat my statement from the recent Extraordinary Council Meeting that in the PPWG we have spent not one single minute in discussing the spatial strategy for the district; particularly the location of new settlements or the expansions of the major towns in the district. **YET A CLEAR PROPOSAL WAS PUBLISHED IN THE LOCAL PRESS. THIS IS A TRAVESTY OF THE PPWG PROCESS.**

The evidence base appears to be following the Spatial Strategy not being prepared in accordance with the NPPF requirements to allow an assessment of different spatial strategies

I have repeatedly pointed out the lack of the evidence base. Some evidence is now being produced, but with the apparent aim of justifying a Spatial Strategy which has already been decided on rather than forming the basis of the choice on which the Spatial Strategy was made.

As just one example of this I have now seen the WYG Transportation Assessment, although it appears still not to be publicly available. I had asked that it should examine the various options open to the Council and assess the strengths and weaknesses and be of a state that could inform any Spatial Strategy. Instead, it looks only at certain very limited options. In total it considers 12 options; of these 4 are rejected almost immediately as they look at what would happen if UDC built 2 or 3 times the number of houses required; a further 4 are also rejected immediately as being unrealistic as they assume not a single further new home is approved in any existing settlement for the next 15 years. That leaves only 4 scenarios which are considered – all 4 essentially assume 750 new homes built in Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow, limited building in the villages and some 2,600 new homes in one or more new settlements (3 of the 4 scenarios) or in Takeley and spread around other settlements (the fourth).

Despite the clear issues identified by the Plan Inspector in 2014, there is not a single scenario which does not assume large-scale house-building in Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow. I have asked who instructed WYG just to look at these scenarios and never received a response. Again, the sole purpose of this report appears to be to justify a pre-determined Spatial Strategy.

As a result, whilst the report looks at the effect of congestion on the wider highway network, it completely ignores, for example, the comparative effect of further development on congestion in the existing settlements (where congestions is already at its worst).

The officer response to my question claims that the term of reference were a technical officer matter only, but I don't see how this can be the case, when the report which has been produced is predicated entirely on certain very limited spatial strategy assumptions.

Exactly the same issue arises on the Water Cycle Study – in fact even worse since only one spatial strategy has been presented.

I asked before the August 2016 PPWG meeting where the evidence was to underpin the Spatial Strategy, and I ask again, where is it? There is nothing that I have seen which allows anyone to choose the best of a reasonable range of Spatial Strategies. Cllr Rolfe completely ignored the question when he replied to my August letter, and no answer has been received by Saffron Walden Town Council when they have asked a similar question of Cllr Rolfe and then of Mr Glenday when he presented to them on 17 November 2016.

Not only that, but the evidence base being assembled doesn't even appear relevant or appropriate. I have seen that a brief update to the 2013 Saffron Walden Highways Mitigation Assessment appeared on the website during the course of 22 November 2016, without having been commissioned by the PPWG or seen by it, and without any input from the PPWG, but was then taken down. More fundamentally however, it is prepared on a completely outdated basis. The rejected 2014 Plan assumed that 880 new homes would be built during the Plan Period, of which 80 had been approved and 800 were proposed. Since then a total of 600 new homes have been approved, and the current draft Spatial Strategy assumes a further 750 will be allocated to Saffron Walden, or 1,350 in total. Despite the increase in the number of new homes proposed from 880 to 1350, the update is prepared on the assumption that only 880 new homes will be built in the Plan Period.

Issues raised by the documents to be produced at the PPWG meeting

I should like to have answers please to the following issues at the 28 November meeting. I am raising them now so officers can collate the necessary evidence.

- In relation to the Saffron Walden Transport Update:
 - When will we see an update that considers the 1350 new homes proposed rather than just 880?
 - The Update is very brief but nevertheless raises grave issues about the traffic congestion in Saffron Walden, and as far as I can see makes it absolutely clear that further large-scale house-building to the east of Saffron Walden is completely unsustainable;
 - In particular, you will be aware that the Manor Oak development which was given outline planning permission has a lay-out without a suitable link road. As the Update says (on p9):
“The eastern link road is a key element for delivering these measures, particularly in encouraging traffic to circumnavigate the town centre. The town centre, including the Radwinter Rd/Thaxted Rd junction is an AQMA, and the ability to address some of the congestion issues which could exacerbate the air quality would be compromised if the eastern link road is not of sufficient standard to encourage traffic to use it.
The Essex Design Guide states:
Within new residential areas, vehicular movement should be convenient, safe and pleasant, but vehicular access is to be provided for in such a way as to be consistent with the achievement of an attractive environment and the needs of the pedestrian or cyclist who have to share the same space. Through traffic is to be

excluded from new residential areas, and the layout and attractiveness of the environment should be such as to discourage the use of the car for local trips and encourage walking and cycling. To achieve these aims, the environmental requirements of the urban space within which each road is located should determine the width and speed of alignment of the road. This means that the character and pleasantness of the space takes precedence over the speed and throughput of traffic to be carried by the road contained within it. By 'calming' traffic in residential areas in this way, there should be a corresponding benefit in increased pedestrian safety and thus the pleasantness and usefulness of the environment to the pedestrian.

The ECC Development Management Policies document provides guidance on the categorisation of routes and their functions. It would be expected that the eastern link road would fulfil the function of a Secondary Distributor Route, PR2, to accord with the existing function of Thaxted Road; Radwinter Road is a Radial Feeder, PR1. Traffic volumes in excess of 3,000 vehicles per day, including HGVs are, as per the Essex Design Guide, unsuitable for residential roads of the type being proposed by the site promoters.

Therefore, for the reasons set out above, it is recommended that the eastern link road is routed appropriately around the Manor Oaks development and routed sensitively through or around the LP sites to the south. It should be of a standard that will attract traffic to reassign to it, should not compromise the environment of the residential development, and should enable other highway mitigation measures to be implemented across the town.”

- The Update is clear therefore that the proposed road layout is not suitable, but also that the whole Manor Oak site is unsuitable for a link road. As the Update says, *“Through traffic is to be excluded from residential areas”*. Even if it were acceptable to the Manor Oak developer, a link road cannot therefore be put through the residential development. The traffic Update appears therefore to rule out further development to the east of Saffron Walden unless further land becomes available to the north to permit a link road to the north of the Manor Oak site – what is the Council’s position on this?
- The Update concludes (on p.10):
*“Whilst we still await the final analysis of traffic routing, from the work that we have done so far, we are reasonably confident that the estimated level of traffic using the eastern link road would be at least as much as the earlier work assumed, which lends weight to our recommendation that the link road should be direct and not traverse the centre of the development.
If this is not reconcilable then we would not recommend further development in the east of Saffron Walden as it would not be possible to improve the existing road network within the town to accommodate the additional traffic.”*
- The Update considers only the link road and the Radwinter Road / Thaxted Road junction. As you will be aware the base 2013 Assessment concluded that with 880 new homes to be built over the Plan Period, 5 of the 11 principal junctions in Saffron Walden would be over capacity by 2026 even with a fully functioning link road and all mitigation measures. The Update notes that in fact current traffic levels are worse than predicted in 2013, but does not include any update to cover any of the other junctions. When will this information be available?
- Assuming that the Update is further updated to include predictions for the full 1350 homes proposed and analysed all of the junctions, I fail to see how it could in any case allow one to compare the sustainability of different Spatial Strategies. How are you proposing this is done?
- The Economic Viability Study states at Appendix C that the secondary school children from the 800 homes stated (again, I’m not clear why 800 rather than the 600 approved or the 1350 in total proposed – perhaps you can explain?) will need to go to school at the Joyce Franklin Academy in Newport. Is this really intended? It’s completely unsustainable to build new homes in Saffron Walden if the children will have to travel to Newport to be educated. I complained in my August letter at the lack of any education strategy,

and refer to it again below, but this shows how vital an education strategy is to the Sustainability analysis – you can't just treat it as an ECC problem as the officers response proposes

Continuing lack of evidence

I complained in my August letter at the continuing lack of evidence. The following is still outstanding:

- an Air Quality study for the district, and an updated study in relation to the unlawful pollution levels in Saffron Walden modelling the effects of the draft Spatial Strategy
- There is still no Infrastructure Assessment or Plan. As far as I am aware, there has been no consideration whatsoever of necessary or desirable infrastructure in connection with any new Local Plan. Nor was there any proper infrastructure plan with the failed draft Local Plan, so we have nothing even as a starting point. In Cllr Rolfe's response to my August 2016 letter he said that a full Infrastructure Plan has been commissioned. We have no information on whom that was commissioned by, on what basis, why the terms weren't tabled at the PPWG or when it is scheduled to appear, in draft and in final form. Can we please table both the terms of reference for it and the timetable for its presentation?
- There is no education strategy. In his response to my letter Cllr Rolfe claimed that the Council had consulted ECC "*on all potential site allocations to ascertain if there are any school capacity issues*". Quite clearly that is not an education strategy. The evidence and feedback from ECC Education has never been presented to the PPWG or otherwise published as far as I am aware. Where is the evidence of the effect of the current draft Spatial Strategy on school provision and need and where need will be accommodated? Again, how can you have a draft Spatial Strategy without this? If it exists, please table it to the PPWG so we can discuss it. The officer response seems to imply that it is regarded as a purely ECC matter, but it is impossible for us to decide on the comparative sustainability of different strategies without knowing how far children will have to go to school. The Saffron Walden County High is for example already full with a large shortfall of places even without further development allocations. If 750 new homes are built in Saffron Walden, where would the children go to school? Exactly the same question applies to any other proposed allocation;

There are no Sustainability Assessments at all on any proposed spatial strategies. Indeed there are not even any reasonable alternatives to the 27 June draft spatial strategy on which to prepare a Sustainability Assessment. I asked this before, and was referred to the December 2015 site assessments. These were very superficial in any case, being internally inconsistent and providing no basis on which to make a comparative decision, but the response completely fails to address the question – where are the Comparative Sustainability Assessments which are required to be prepared on all reasonable spatial strategy alternatives? They appear to not even exist.

Project Planning

Various councillors have requested a proper project plan – a draft was presented in September, with an action to update it. I have seen no update and no Project Plan is being presented to the meeting. Why not? Can we please table this as a regular item.

I also asked to be given a detailed list of the evidence base which will support the Local Plan, with a description of which documents already exist, what evidence is still to be prepared, and the dates on which such evidence is expected to be received. The response was that this evidence could be given to me, but it still hasn't been.

In my August letter I pointed out how far behind everything was, and the need for a proper Project Plan – the response was that everything was on course. It of course wasn't, and the

process came to a juddering halt on 7 November for reasons which have still not been explained.

Community Infrastructure Levy

In my August letter, I said that "I have repeatedly asked for a CIL timetable, consistently this has been delayed and at the last meeting the PPWG referred to historic UDC policy to retain a s.106 approach. Given that s,106 has been made consistently less attractive as the Government seeks to push councils to adopting CIL, and given that the NPPF specifically requires that where practicable (and in our case it presumably is), a CIL costing be prepared in conjunction with the draft Plan. I would have assumed that at least an outline CIL costing would have been an essential part of each alternative spatial strategy, so we can see what associated level of infrastructure could be provided. As we are all too well aware, the current spatial strategy has resulted in very little new infrastructure, and changes to s.106 have made the position worse".

No response at all was given; there is still no discussion of the CIL on the agenda, and no information whatsoever about it. The Council appears to have pre-determined that it will not adopt a CIL. Can you please confirm what is happening in this regard?

I look forward to discussing these issues

John