

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,  
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on WEDNESDAY, 23  
JUNE 2021 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)  
Councillors G Driscoll, V Isham, G LeCount (Vice-Chair) and  
G Sell

Officers in attendance: C Gibson (Democratic Services Officer), G Glenday (Assistant  
Director - Planning), S Miles (Local Plans and New Communities  
Manager), S Payne (Local Plan Project Manager) and  
C Shanley-Grozavu (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in Attendance: Councillor J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Local  
Plan) and Councillor G Bagnall (Chair of Local Plan Leadership  
Group).

**SC15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies were received from Councillors Coote, Criscione, Jones, Lavelle and  
De Vries.

**SC16 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee (Local Plan) meeting held on 16  
February 2021 were approved.

The Chair provided an update to the Committee following the Scrutiny  
Committee held on 17 June 2021, on the latest position in respect of accessing  
information on the Stansted Airport enquiry. He said that detailed responses  
were still outstanding. Councillor Evans said that he would be speaking to the  
Director of Public Services on this matter the following day.

**SC17 LOCAL PLAN QUARTER 1 PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

Councillor Evans introduced the report. He said that he was pleased to report  
that matters were on track, good progress had been made since the last report  
and there were no work tasks currently being shown as 'Red'. He said that the  
Local Plan Leadership Group was meeting on 24 June 2021 and that Housing  
Numbers requirements were to be discussed at the meeting.

The Local Plan Project Manager outlined the report and the appendices. He  
highlighted risks 2 and 17 in that a senior planner within the Policy Team was  
leaving and he said that an advert had been placed to recruit a replacement. He  
said that new risks 35 – 38 covered the management of the work of consultants.  
He referred to the Local Plan- Preferred Options Timetable that had been

supported by the Leadership Group. He said that the Call for Sites period had now ended, that around 300 sites were being verified and logged and that 17 consultant studies were in various stages of procurement as shown on the Local Plan Workstream document that reported the overall RAG status as 'Amber'. He also referred to the Project Plan Live Tasks document that showed all the tasks which had been or were due to be progressed within the current quarter.

Councillor LeCount said that he had recently had meetings with planning officers and was pleased that the plan was on-track. He referred to the Call for Sites that had identified around 300 sites and the fact that the evaluation would take six months. He suggested that some of the good sites could be identified and visited during those six months.

The Local Plan Project Manager explained that the 17 consultant technical studies were needed to provide the evidence base to inform the process. The Cabinet had recently agreed the draft vision and objectives for the new Local Plan. The next stage was to get a steer from members at the Local Plan Leadership Group and Cabinet on housing numbers, a settlement hierarchy and a Preliminary Outline Strategy . This would then allow officers to undertake an assessment of individual sites. He said that the timetable was ambitious and achievable.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Local Plan Project Manager said that evidence from the technical studies would be brought back to both the Local Plan Leadership Group (LPLG) and the Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Group (SIDG) in "bite-size chunks", and this would be an opportunity for them to examine the evidence. He also reported that work was also taking place with Parish Councils.

The Chair asked Councillor Bagnall as Chair of the LPLG if he was comfortable with the proposed timetable. Councillor Bagnall said that he met regularly with the three lead officers and was comfortable with the timetable and the consultation at this stage.

In response to a further question from Councillor LeCount relating to "bite-size chunks", the Local Plan Project Manager said that the difficulty was that none of the 300 sites identified could be ruled out until all the evidence had been examined. He said that the objectives had been set, and now numbers need to be agreed and an outline strategy produced.

Councillor Sell said that he was pleased with the progress of the Local Plan and agreed that the timetable was ambitious but that the Council needed to get it right. He said that he recognised that 300 sites had been identified but considered that 20% of the sites might deliver 80% of the development. He asked for reassurance that a replacement would be in place for the senior planner who was leaving the Council and he also asked as to how the current Planning Bill might affect the process.

Councillor Evans said that previous vacancies within the team had been filled and that the possibility existed of utilising County Council officers who were

familiar with the district. He said that the implications of the Planning Bill could not be answered until the finer details of the Bill had been published.

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager confirmed that two previous vacancies in the team had been filled promptly. He outlined the recruitment timetable to replace the senior planner and said that, if necessary, consideration would be given to making an interim appointment. He also said that the implications from the Planning Bill remained uncertain.

Councillor Isham raised several issues. He said that he could not see an overview visionary plan in place and that there needed to be clarity particularly in respect of the design process, where the skills base of urban designers was very important.

The Local Plan Project Manager said that the draft objectives and vision had been agreed by the Cabinet. He referred to master planning and said that further decisions were to agree the Preliminary Outline Strategy and to confirm housing numbers. He said that discussions during the period June to December 2021 were pivotal in that the Council needed to negotiate with landowners and developers of alternative sites. He also said that a Principal Urban Designer was an integral part of the team of 10 officers and was used to looking at sites. He said that all work must be evidence based.

Councillor Evans said that leadership was being provided through the LPLG. He said that a document would be produced in respect of relationships with landowners and promoters through a "level playing field" in a legally enforceable way.

Councillor Bagnall clarified the role of the LPLG and confirmed that up-front discussions with landowners were important.

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that the Preliminary Outline Strategy would help move things forward and that consideration had been given to thinking spatially.

Councillor LeCount said that large businesses usually worked on such projects using an algorithm but that this was not happening in this instance. He said that it was now being said that there would be on-going discussions with developers, and he asked for clarity in respect of what the vision was.

The Local Plan Project Manager said that criteria would assess sites against the draft objectives and that the Preliminary Outline Strategy would also be used. He said it was particularly important with large sites to talk to landowners. He stressed the importance of negotiating without prejudice and said that the methodology would help secure a sound plan.

In response to questions from the Chair, the Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that there had been some problems with the mapping software but that the mapping should be completed by early to mid-July. He also said that he would confirm with the Chair which specific issues the Water Cycle Study would be looking at.

Councillor Sell asked about the relationship between the Council and MHCLG.

Both Councillor Evans and the Local Plan and New Communities Manager confirmed that the relationship was good and proper and that the MHCLG were satisfied that progress was being made.

The Chair summarised that this had been an extremely impressive rigorous report; he noted that considerable progress had been made, the decrease in the risk scores and the future plans for risk management. He commended officers and those Members of the Executive involved.

The recommendations were taken with unanimous support.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. note the conclusions of the report on risk and project management and endorse the proposed actions.
2. notes the attached draft letter update to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for Quarter 1 of the current financial year.

The Chair thanked all attendees and closed the meeting.

*The meeting ended at 8.15pm.*