

COUNCIL held at ZOOM - [HTTPS://ZOOM.US/](https://zoom.us/), on THURSDAY, 30 APRIL 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillor R Freeman (Chair)
Councillors A Armstrong, H Asker, G Bagnall, S Barker, M Caton, A Coote, C Criscione, C Day, A Dean, G Driscoll, D Eke, J Evans, P Fairhurst, M Foley, N Gregory, N Hargreaves, V Isham, R Jones, A Khan, P Lavelle, G LeCount, P Lees, M Lemon, B Light, J Lodge, J Loughlin, S Luck, S Merifield, E Oliver, R Pavitt, L Pepper, N Reeve, G Sell, A Storah, M Sutton, M Tayler and J De Vries

Officers in attendance: A Bochel (Democratic Services Officer), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager), D French (Chief Executive), C Gibson (Democratic Services Officer), R Harborough (Director - Public Services), S Miles (Planning Policy Team Leader), S Pugh (Assistant Director - Governance and Legal) and A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services)

Public Speakers: A Dodsley (Little Easton Parish Council), D Hall (Great Chesterford Parish Council), G Mott (Elsenham Parish Council), V Thompson (Stop Easton Park)

C80

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Freeman, Eke, Fairhurst, Asker, Coote and Light declared non-pecuniary interests in that they were members of Saffron Walden Town Council.

Councillor Barker declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Essex County Council.

Councillor Day declared a non-pecuniary interest as his wife was a Treasurer of Stop Easton Park.

Councillor Dean declared a non-pecuniary interest in that his wife was on the Board of the Gardens of Easton Lodge.

Councillor Criscione declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he had held a meeting with Mr Thompson of Stop Easton Park.

Councillor Pepper declared a non-pecuniary interest in that she had been actively involved with Stop Easton Park.

Councillor Foley declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the Campaign to Protect Rural Essex.

Councillors Armstrong and Jones declared non-pecuniary interests as members of Dunmow Town Council.

Councillor Bagnall declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Takeley Parish Council.

Councillor Lemon declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Hatfield Heath Parish Council.

Councillor Isham declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Broxton Parish Council.

Councillor Merifield declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Stebbing Parish Council.

Councillor Evans declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Stebbing Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

Councillor Sell declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Stansted Parish Council and Stansted Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

Councillor Reeve declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of High Easter Parish Council.

Councillor Khan declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Stansted Parish Council.

Councillor Hargreaves declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Newport Parish Council and Newport and Quendon and Rickling Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

C81

LOCAL PLAN - DECISION FOLLOWING INSPECTORS' LETTER

Councillor Evans gave a summary of the report which recommended the withdrawal of the Local Plan following receipt of the Inspectors' letter, and the preparation of a new Plan.

Councillor Caton proposed the following amendment which was seconded by Councillor Dean.

To remove the recommendation in the report in full and replace with the following wording:

The Council recognises the deeply held and divergent views of members across the Council, which reflect personal principles and the range of views in our community.

The Council believes that in whatever future form (revised or new), our District's Local Plan should:

(1) Contribute to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at

the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;

(2) Support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of low/zero carbon housing of all types and costs, including truly affordable homes, required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and create a high quality, built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and

(3) Contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, help to improve biodiversity, prudent use of natural resources, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy, with the potential to create surplus energy.

The Council, however, is disappointed by the invidious position the current administration has placed our community in. In particular, it is concerned by:

(1) the distinct lack of public engagement and participation since January in the proposal to withdraw the current draft Local Plan;

(2) the estimated £1m spent by the administration on the Plan in the period since they declined to withdraw the draft plan when the Inspectors offered them that opportunity in the summer of 2019 and the likely £3m cost of developing a new plan;

(3) a lack of any indication of a revised spatial strategy before making a decision which indicates in broad terms where new housing will be allocated in any new plan and a readiness to rule out large Garden Communities as an option before any reconsideration; and

(4) the inevitability that the development of a new plan will require a two-fold increase in required housing under central government regulations, and

(5) that the district will increasingly be subjected to speculative applications for ad hoc developments without adequate infrastructure to address an even greater fiveyear land supply deficit.

Therefore, Council instructs the Cabinet Member for Planning and the Local Plan to refer consideration of the future direction of the Local Plan firstly to open and transparent discussion with Members and public participants within a forum such as the Planning Policy Working Group, or equivalent, before bringing back the matter to this Council with considered proposals.

Members arguing against the amendment noted the following:

- They believed the Council had engaged with the public sufficiently. It was important to start again with a blank piece of paper to ensure a good level of public participation. The new plan would now be fully in this Council's control.
- Garden communities might be a part of the new local plan if they were appropriate.

- The Council had taken independent advice on the options available. A peer review had been clear that the cost of withdrawing the plan would be the same as amending the plan. The matter was now a planning decision rather than whether financial impacts weighed in favour of one option or the other.
- The Council was not able to consult with inspectors once the letter had been received.

Members arguing for the amendment noted the following:

- The aim of the amendment was to ensure the options for the Local Plan were debated in another forum with further options for public engagement.
- There would be an increase in the amount of houses the District was required to build should work begin on a new plan, and given the number of houses the District was required to build, it would be necessary to deliver communities of some scale.
- It might be more costly to prepare a new plan than to amend the current one.
- It would be positive to discuss the inspectors' letter with the inspectors. Other councils had done this upon receipt of their letters.

RESOLVED by 6 votes to 32 that the amendment proposed by Cllr Caton was defeated

Members returned to debate the recommendations in the report.

Members against the recommendations noted the following points:

- No plan was perfect and the Council had been trying to adopt a local plan for a long time. It was told by three different inspectors that the previous local plan was on track and had received a grant of £750,000 for its work on garden communities. There was a limited amount of available space to build within Uttlesford.
- With some effort, it might be possible to make the appropriate changes to the existing plan.

Members in favour of the recommendations noted the following points:

- The inspectors' letter was clear that withdrawal of the Local Plan was likely to be the only pragmatic and realistic alternative.
- It was important to introduce the Community Infrastructure Levy and put money aside to support parish councils to develop neighbourhood plans.
- The Council would be able to ensure the new plan had effective engagement across the community, and that houses would be built in the right places.
- The withdrawal of the plan was supported by some parish councils.
- It was important for the Council to manage expectations as a lot of houses would need to be built and the new plan would not please everyone.
- A new plan should protect the Countryside Protection Zone and the Metropolitan Green Belt, and take into account the needs of small and medium sized businesses.
- It would be important to have a detailed analysis of what went wrong with both the current plan and the two previous plans.

A recorded vote was called for. The results were as follows:

For the withdrawal of the Local Plan and the preparation a new Plan: Councillors Armstrong, Asker, Bagnall, Coote, Criscione, Day, Driscoll, Eke, Fairhurst, Foley, Freeman, Hargreaves, Isham, Jones, Lavelle, LeCount, Lees, Lemon, Light, Lodge, Luck, Merifield, Pepper, Reeve, Storah, Sutton, Tayler and de Vries

Against the withdrawal of the Local Plan and the preparation of a new plan: Councillors Barker, Caton, Dean, Khan, Loughlin, Oliver and Sell

RESOLVED by 31 votes to 7 to withdraw the Local Plan and prepare a new plan.

Graham Mott (Elsenham Parish Council), Andy Dodsley (Little Easton Parish Council), Vincent Thompson (Stop Easton Park) and David Hall (Great Chesterford Parish Council) spoke on this item. Summaries of their statements are appended to these minutes.

The meeting ended at 9pm.

Minute Item 2

Summaries of public statements:

Graham Mott (Elsenham Parish Council):

Inspectors of the Local Plan had recommended a strategy of reducing garden settlements to more small and medium sized sites. Many of the smaller sites were not examined by the inspectors, seeming to assume that there would be many of these sites readily available. One of the inspectors' objections to the garden settlements was on the basis that much of the housing would not become available until after the plan period. Extending the plan period would solve this issue. Government has now decreed that councils have a plan in place by 2023. A new plan would be a slow process, and the Council would do well to draw as much as possible from work already done on the previous plan.

Andy Dodsley (Little Easton Parish Council):

Following the inspectors' letter in January, the peer review carried out at the Council was the correct action to take. The inspectors were clear that they had no appetite for modifications to the plan. There was nothing else to do but withdraw it. The plan is fatally flawed and the Council needs to start again. This should be an open and transparent process, engaging with residents and taking account of their views. The current plan does not reflect the vision and aspirations of local communities. Residents delivered judgment on this in the May 2019 elections. It was necessary to develop a new approach that planning inspectors and residents considered sound.

Vincent Thompson (Stop Easton Park):

Thank you for ensuring the wellbeing of the community. The inspectors and peer review had given a firm base for working together for achieving a local plan that we all need and want. The inspectors' emphasis on the need to engage with residents was welcome, as was the Council's emphasis on protecting the district's heritage, character and natural capital, and insisting on locally led development corporations. A unanimous vote to withdraw would restore the trust of the electorate. There was a need to provide large open and spaces for physical and mental wellbeing. The Council has the power and responsibility to stop development in Easton Park, and the ancient park could be restored.

David Hall:

UDC had stated that any decision taken with regard to the Local Plan would be subject to consultation. However the Council had been subject to criticism that constructive, pro-active, positive planning was lacking in the preparation of the Local Plan from, amongst others, Historic England and Great Chesterford Parish Council. The parish council's requests for additional information went unanswered. He urged consultation with and respect for local opinion in the development of a new local plan.