

**LOCAL PLAN LEADERSHIP GROUP held at ZOOM on TUESDAY, 18 AUGUST 2020 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor A Storah (Chair)  
Councillors G Bagnall, M Caton, P Lees, M Lemon, B Light, S Merifield, R Pavitt, N Reeve, M Sutton and M Tayler

Guest (non-Voting): Councillor J Evans

Officers in attendance: G Glenday (Assistant Director - Planning), R Harborough (Director of Public Services), S Miles (Local Plans and New Communities Manager), S Nicholas (Garden Communities Senior Planner) and H Richardson (Garden Communities Project Officer)

Visitors: Councillors C Day, A Dean, M Foley, J Lodge and A Maciuca (Saffron Walden Reporter)

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

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Freeman, Bagnall, Tayler.

The following Councillors made declarations of interest;

Cllr. Light, a Saffron Walden Town Councillor  
Cllr. Merifield, a member of Stebbing Parish Council  
Cllr. Lemon, a Parish Councillor for Hatfield Heath and White Roding.  
Cllr. Reeve, a Parish Councillor for High Easter in addition to his Ward responsibilities.  
Cllr. Evans, Chair of the Stebbing Neighbourhood Plan.

Noted in previous meeting 29.07.20;

Cllr. Freeman noted himself as a Parish Councillor for Saffron Walden Town Council.

Cllr. Bagnall, a member of Takeley Parish Council.

It was suggested that these declarations be noted in writing and only be addressed if there were a change in circumstance to avoid repetition in future meetings.

The Group agreed this proposal.

**2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The following requests of amendment were identified from the minutes dated 29.07.20;

Page 4 - Cllr. Evans asked that he be added to the list of attendees of the meeting.

Page 6 - Cllr Storah said the working arrangements should be set out more clearly and appended to the minutes with the terms of reference for members and public to access easily.

Page 7, third bullet point - Cllr. Storah asked for the wording to be amended from "The Portfolio-holder for Planning and the Local Plan will be invited to all meetings to answer any questions that may arise;" to "The Portfolio-holder for Planning and the Local Plan meetings will be invited to ask and/or answer any questions that may arise."

Cllr Evans - re. Terms of Reference in connection to the bullet point that referred to meetings being held in private. The Cabinet agreed that the expression, "to meet in private when otherwise matters could be considered prejudicial to the Council" was inappropriate and it should be amended to, "matters be held in private when they might be considered prejudicial to the interests of the making of the plan if discussed in public".

Roger Harborough stated decisions on the terms of reference were not for the working group to decide. Cabinet could undertake any consultation they felt necessary before making a decision.

It was proposed that Cllr. Evans took the proposal for the wording to Cabinet for consideration.

Page 8 para. 4 - Cllr. Storah asked for this to be removed as it wasn't clear that he had supported Cllr. Bagnall's Proposal.

Page 9, line 3 - Cllr. Storah asked that "The roles, function and objectives needed to be clarified" be amended to "The roles, function and objectives needed to be adhered to".

Page 10, para. 5, line 3 - Cllr Merifield asked that the word "supported" in the line below be changed to "supportive"

Every councillor should be supported of the Local Plan, if they are not they would be working against the people of the district.

Gordon Glenday responded to an earlier comment raised regarding public speaking. He noted at the last meeting it had been discussed having up to 10 speakers and a maximum of 45 minutes total speaking time. The group agreed to leave it to the chairs discretion based on the numbers at each meeting.

Page 14, para. 3 - Cllr. Storah asked that "The Chair made some suggestions for the group to agree" be amended to "The Chair made some suggestions for the group to consider".

## PROJECT INITIATION DOCUMENT

Stephen Miles introduced the document highlighting the following;

The document defined the Local Plan project setting out the aims of the project and why it should go ahead, who is involved and their responsibilities. It provides a baseline for management of the Local Plan. He noted it was good practice to have such a document when starting a project of this size.

Officers were advised by the Peer Review Group not to bring any of these papers to the group for consideration, in order to allow further time to consider the start of the Local Plan project in the light of the government's proposals to amend the planning system. Officers are not recommending that these papers follow on to the next Cabinet meeting for review.

The documents had been presented today for the group to comment.

The Chair said the group would be assisting with the Council's response to the White Paper.

Roger Harborough said it is the statutory duty of the Council to prepare a Local Plan under the current framework. As the timeline was unclear on the implementation of the new legislation, the Peer Review Group have advised the Council to focus on activities relevant to both the current and new statutory arrangements. This issue would be addressed in the 3rd All Member Workshop on September 8th. Progressing work at this stage under the current arrangements would run the risk of incurring substantial expenditure on work that might become redundant.

In response to members asking for officers' direction as to the focus of topics that would cross both frameworks, he said Peer Review Group had highlighted some potential areas of focus. However it would be premature to make suggestions. It would be sensible to wait until the Council had met with the Ministry.

It was highlighted by members that community engagement was a topic that would cross both frameworks. Engaging at an early stage with cross generational collaboration to encourage wider consultation. The Youth Council should be consulted on engagement, as a useful early focus to inform the Council's response to the consultation on the White Paper, by October 29th. The Government supported social media and digital means of engagement and less emphasis on traditional forms of communication. It was noted that site identification would be another valuable topic to focus on.

The portfolio holder asked officers to refresh the Council's data on brownfield sites to circulate to the Members, Parish and Town Councils with a view of identifying further sites. In addition members highlighted the need to include green and biodiversity sites to maintain the rural aspect of the district.

It was requested officers create a set of standard questions to be circulated by parish and town councils as a focus for community consultation.

Members asked for background reading that would assist the group ahead of making any formal contribution to the Local Plan.

The group agreed to progress the Local Plan within the current framework in the current situation, to prepare the ground for the next stages.

Members then went onto to discuss the Project Initiation Document in more detail and suggested the following amendments;

Para. 3.1 - The Chair suggested an amendment from "The Local Plan relates to the whole of the district and is intended to cover the period up to 2040 and beyond" to "The Local Plan relates to the whole of the district and will cover the period up to 2040 and beyond"

Officers responded to a question raised about plan period. Currently the time period the Local Plan had to cover at least 15 years from adoption (ref to 2040), and the start date of the period is at the discretion of the council. Under the government proposals, the plan period could be reduced to a 10 year period.

Para. 3.2 - The Chair suggested an amendment to " The objectives of the project are to deliver an up to date Local Plan which;

1. Meets the Councils corporate plan and objectives for the plan
2. Meets the districts identified development needs in terms of new housing employment and commerce
3. Delivers the associated infrastructure as and when required
4. Is evidence based
5. Is Sound

He suggested that this would replace the 2nd and 3rd bullets point in paragraph 3.3.

In response to the suggested amendments, officers said the bullet points in para. 3.3 covered the 3 categories proposed by the government into which on the district would be allocated;

1. Growth areas
2. Areas for renewal (brownfield land evidence)
3. Protection

These were not referenced in the proposed amendments and it would be important to capture these issues, and consider the evidence base required to support them.

This proposal was supported by the group.

In response to the Chairs question ref. page 24 on the Project Manager position, officers confirmed the position was not vacant.

It was agreed the Chair of the Leadership Group would attend the Portfolio Holder meetings to keep engagement open between officers and members on the Local Plan Leadership Group.

The Chair referenced page 25 in connection with the adoption date of the Local Plan and asked whether the group wanted to wait until officers had met with the ministry for guidance before an adoption date be decided. The group generally agreed to remain with the original submission date of Dec. 2023.

Members asked for a direct link between the regulations stages to make it clearer to follow, using start and end dates.

Officers advised getting feedback from the ministry before committing to an adoption date. Removing contingency from the project plan in order to meet the submission date would not demonstrate good project management.

The Group supported this approach.

#### 4 **DRAFT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME**

Stephen Miles noted that many points from this document had been covered in the previous item. He introduced the document set out the draft timetable for the Local Plan.

Page 38 - The Chair - referred to the final paragraph that noted "there was no requirement for the LDS to set out a timetable for the production of any SPDs". He would have expected to have seen a schedule of SPDs that the Council intended to produce.

Officers clarified that SPDs need to supplement policies. At this stage there were no up to date policies. The Climate Change guidance would be brought to the group in the future for review. The current wording in the paragraph is still relevant. An interim document could be produced to support the work. There could be consideration given to design codes that would apply to both existing and new systems.

In response to the chairs question of updating the five year land supply more frequently before the Plan is adopted, Officers stated it would be an unrealistic task for the Council to deliver due to the time and resources it would involve. The work is carried out annually.

Officers confirmed that the Government was proposing to replace Section 106 Agreements and Community Infrastructure Levies for each district with a nationally prescribed approach which calculated levy contributions based on the value of completed developments. The Council would need to see the detail before it could respond and assess the impact

It was noted by the group it would be a useful addition to the papers to have a statement demonstrating they were produced ahead of the White Paper.

## 5 **STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Item deferred to the next meeting.

## 6 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

Item deferred to the next meeting.

## 7 **HOUSING NUMBERS**

Stephen Miles gave the group a short update on the proposals in the Government's white paper and the separate consultation on the standardised methodology.

The calculation proposed in the government's standardised methodology resulted in a need for 1,230 dwellings per annum across the district in order to meet a national target of over 300,000 homes per annum. The methodology is intended to address affordability issues for young people and provide homes where people want to live. This figure was much higher than the current calculation of approx. 700 homes per annum. The figures were based on median earnings and median house prices to adjust the need calculation to address affordability. The new calculation also included an add-on factor for worsening affordability over a ten year period. The current housing need figure was capped. The uncapped figure would be 800 homes per annum. The new calculation proposes to remove the cap. The only areas of the country with higher housing requirement numbers as a proportion of existing dwellings are in the London Boroughs. The new figure of 1,230 reflected the assessment of housing need, not the housing requirement.

The white paper proposes to amend the standardised methodology taking into account other factors such as constraints, size of existing settlements and opportunities for brownfield development. It is proposing to make the final requirement figure binding to local authorities. It also mentioned that plans should include consideration of a buffer, but did not specify a number and no further details had been set out.

The Council should respond positively to the consultation and should set out any concerns over the future housing numbers. Additional points for consideration;

- The current proposals for setting housing requirements do not have any mechanism to take into account the government's ambition for growth areas such as the O2C Arc
- Confirmation of how constraints were factored into the process of reducing the need to give a requirement figure

- Deliverability based on the size of existing urban settlements
- Comparison of neighbouring local authority areas will be included in the consultation response.

A draft response would be presented to the group at a later meeting.

The housing numbers came from the household forecast which was influenced by the population forecast. Both are published every 2 years. The most recent are the 2018-based forecasts which were published in July 2020. The figures project forward past trends.

The status of requirements needed to be explored. Government may not make them statutory as that might lead to challenges in the courts through applications for a judicial review. The white paper suggested a local authority could borrow against the expected future receipts from the proposed infrastructure levy to fund infrastructure upfront. This process in practice could prove more challenging and would need further review.

The group expressed their willingness to assist with formulating the council's response to the technical consultation and. Share a draft with the Portfolio Holder and Chair at a later date.

The proposed date for the next meeting would be towards the end of September, or the beginning of October, to be confirmed following on from the All Member Workshop and the meeting with the Ministry.

As it was agreed to postpone any recommendation to Cabinet as to how to proceed, it was agreed the Community Engagement Strategy paper would be reviewed by members outside the meeting and comments sent to the Chair by August 31st. The Chair would collate comments from the group and forward responses to Stephen Miles.

Meeting ended 22:15.