

## **Councillor Evans - Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Local Plan**

### **Council - 8 October 2020**

#### **Local Plan update**

Local Plan Leadership Group and then Scrutiny and Cabinet will continue in their consideration of papers on initiating the Local Plan Project, the timetable for its production and its consultation arrangements. Important 'process documents' (Project Initiation Document, Local Development Scheme & Statement of Community Involvement) are the first steps in ensuring the Council starts the process of developing a Local Plan in the right way and have now been approved at the last meeting of LGS. 'Behind' the timetable sits a detailed project plan that will evolve as the Local Plan develops, and a further paper is proposed to come to Scrutiny Committee (Local Plan) to set out further detail on the project plan as well as the process documents mentioned above.

Local Plan Leadership Group (LPLG) has also considered a draft response (which was submitted by 1 October) to the government's consultation 'Changes to the planning system' which identifies a draft housing need for the district of some 500 homes more than the current need identified by the standard methodology (1,231 compared to 706). Furthermore, the LPLG will be looking at and giving views on how the initial engagement on the Local Plan will be undertaken, and how areas of search for new development sites might be identified.

On the initial Local Plan engagement, an innovative approach is proposed looking across a number of different themes and running for a number of months, each theme preceded by a meeting of constituent members of a community forum. This is designed to engage with as many people and interests as possible, including those who do not routinely get involved in planning consultations.

On the subject of "areas of search", these will include sustainable locations to be considered for potential development but will not of course contain any predetermined views on such potential locations. Being within an area of search will not mean that development is being proposed, let alone supported, there. Similarly, not being within an area of search will not mean that potential development will not be allocated there, since other smaller sized locations or where there may be more requirements for infrastructure or services and facilities will be reviewed too. This will mean that the Council will not be entirely reliant on sites submitted or advanced by landowners and promoters.

#### **Government White Paper - 'Planning for the Future'**

Immediately after the White Paper was published, the Party Leaders were advised by me that Uttlesford had subscribed to the LGA cross party campaign of "Keep it Local" and we shall continue to support the LGA in this. Consistent with that, we shall of course be responding thoroughly and in detail to the radical proposals contained in the White Paper by the deadline of 29 October. As with the 'Planning Changes' proposal, the draft response will be brought before the LPLG, but it will

strongly reflect the views widely expressed informally by members and residents alike that any proposals which would have the effect of reducing members' and community involvement in the planning process are considered to be undemocratic. Likewise, any automatic development rights, limiting Development Management processes in review and appreciation – including pre-application processes -, are also not considered acceptable. The proposed status of Neighbourhood Plans is not yet entirely clear but we shall express our continuing support for them. Any proposals which run contrary to local democracy and community engagement will not be considered acceptable.

### **Stansted Airport Appeal Update**

In July, MAG submitted its appeal against the Council's decision to refuse planning permission for the expansion of the airport's capacity for up to 43 million passengers a year. The Planning Inspectorate notified the Council that the appeal was validly submitted on 12<sup>th</sup> August and so set out the programme for the Inquiry. The programme moving forward is very tight, given the scale and nature of this appeal therefore the Council acted decisively and appointed expert witnesses and our QC and Junior Barrister were instructed to address the technical and legal aspects of our case.

Having appointed a strong and experienced legal and technical team, the first key piece of work to complete was the Council's "Statement of Case" which was submitted by 16<sup>th</sup> September and a copy of the document has been provided to all colleagues. Having submitted a strong "Statement of Case" on behalf of the Council, officers and the legal and consultant team now have to finalise a "Statement of Common Ground" with MAG by 28<sup>th</sup> October. Importantly, MAG are required to submit any addendum to their Environmental Statement first – by 16 October. Moving forward after this, the Council and MAG will need to submit Proofs of Evidence to the Planning Inspectorate by 8<sup>th</sup> December. Given the amount of technical and legal input needed to complete robust Proofs of Evidence, an early December deadline doesn't give us a lot of time to prepare and refine our final case before the Inquiry formally begins on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan 2021. This is the date fixed for commencement of the Inquiry (to be conducted before three Inspectors) and PINS currently proposes to conduct the enquiry partly in person (with live witness evidence) and partly virtually (under new procedures brought about post COVID-19). However, we will of course ensure that the strongest case possible is put to the Inquiry by the deadline for consideration. PINS and the parties will be considering matters regarding the Inquiry at further procedural hearings (Case Management Conferences).

### **Development Management**

The Development Management team continues to perform consistently well, meeting its targets for dealing with planning applications. Significant improvements are being made in the way officers liaise with members and the town/parish councils at the pre-application stage of the planning application process. Meetings are now being held on a number of schemes whereby the developer is presenting proposals to members and town/parish councils before the planning applications are formally submitted.

This enables the developers to hear what members and town/parish councils think of their proposals prior to planning applications being finalised. Amendments can therefore be made to improve schemes to address local people's concerns. Developers are also being pro-actively encouraged to present their proposals to the Essex Quality Design Panel. This Panel of planning and design experts is an independent body that reviews larger development proposals with a view to being a critical friend – suggesting improvements to schemes where appropriate. All of this will hopefully lead to more planning applications coming to Planning Committee in a form that has already picked up and addressed the concerns, needs and expectations of the local community.