

Councillor Evans – Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Local Plan

Council – 8 December 2020

Local Plan update

The Council has recently started its first engagement process by way of early consultation towards its Local Plan. This is an innovative approach engaging members of the community in a series of interlinked conversations in a Community Stakeholder Forum about shaping the future of the District. This consultation will take place over several months rather than the typical six weeks, during which all are encouraged to submit comments on a series of nine different but interrelated themes. The first of these themes is 'Where you live', and following the first meeting on 11 November, residents and other consultees are encouraged to respond by 9 December. Comments can still be submitted on all themes discussed right up until the end of the consultation period in April 2021 and all comments will be considered by the Council when preparing the first draft of the Local Plan.

Local Plan Leadership Group on 26 November is considering / has considered a report on the call for sites (and associated mapping) as well as a report on what other conversations and engagement will take place over the Issues and Options period. In addition to the Community Stakeholder Forum, this includes a Parish and Town Council Forum, the Planning agents Forum, all member briefings, meetings with infrastructure providers, duty to cooperate providers, the Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Group and other engagement forums. This is so as to engage with as wide a range of people and organisations as possible and encourage as wide a range of representations to the consultation as possible.

Members are encouraged to bring to the attention of the Town and Parish Councils, as well as the wider community, these several initiatives and early opportunities provided for consultation and engagement.

Stansted Airport Appeal Update

We have had another all-member briefing in early November to update members on the latest position with the Airport Inquiry and allow questions and clarifications to be discussed. This briefing session was again led by our QC, Phillip Coppel. Work continues between officers and our consultants to progress and finalise the Council's Proofs of Evidence by the 8th December deadline. The Inquiry is still programmed to begin on 12th January 2021 and will be a combination of physical and virtual sitting days going through to the end of March. However, with on-going Covid-19 issues, the Inquiry programme is under constant review and will continue to be so even once the Inquiry starts.

A more detailed update on relevant progress and issues arising will be provided by me from time to time jointly with Councillor Merifield, following standing briefings to us by Officers.

Development Management

The Development Management Team continues to perform well and keep its Performance Indicators in the green which is excellent news, especially given the additional challenges of the new ways of working due to Covid-19. A recent focus for the team has been to renew its focus on improving its customer service and maximising the income it can generate from developers through S106 monitoring fees, the provision of chargeable pre-application advice and Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) with applicants and developers. An indication of how this is progressing is demonstrated by looking at the number of PPAs we now either have agreed or are in the pipeline. At present, we have around over 10 PPAs on the go or in preparation with a potential of generating an additional £200,000 in fees. However, as members are already aware, generating PPA income relies on our ability to provide an excellent, programme-managed service from the pre-app stage through to the application being presented to Committee. This involves officer dealing with issues in a timely manner. This includes the management of one or more meetings between the developer and the Planning Committee members, ward members and Town and Parish Councils to enable them to hear the developer's proposals before they finalise their plans for formal submission.

Feedback from members who have attended these pre-application meetings has been very positive so we hope to promote PPAs further regarding further development proposals as they come forward.

Subject to budgetary issues, it is also hoped that the Team can be augmented in the forthcoming financial year.