

Planning & Local Plan Portfolio Holder - Member Update Report

Full Council, 20th July 2021

Local Plan

In April the Council completed the initial consultation on its Local Plan. The Council received 670 representations, informed by the debates of the Community Stakeholder Forum. These were supplemented by around 100 responses from a youth survey. The comments received have been summarised and published, as appendices in reports submitted to Local Plan Leadership Group in May, and are already being used to inform the drafting of the Local Plan.

The Council is now working to progress the Local Plan at pace. In April an ambitious programme was agreed by Local Plan Leadership Group to work up the Local Plan for consultation early next year. This programme is designed to be transparent, and in the first three months of the year the Local Plan Leadership Group has considered:

- reports on the Vision and objectives for the plan;
- the housing requirement for the plan; and
- a preliminary outline strategy for the plan.

The draft vision and objectives as well as the housing requirement for the plan were agreed by Cabinet on 27 May and 1 July respectively.

Next, LPLG will be considering the preliminary outline strategy, to be informed by an all member workshop in July.

Alongside the first consultation stage, the Council held a call for sites, to inform the options available to the Council for meeting its development needs. These have been published earlier this month, and the Council will consider these carefully when developing the Local Plan. Workshops are planned for the end of July with Town & Parish Councils to discuss the sites received during the call for sites.

Furthermore, the Neighbourhood Plan for Newport, Quendon & Rickling was made at Council on 28 June, I'd like once again to take this opportunity to congratulate the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and the residents of these villages for the hard work they have put into this document.

Development Management

The Development Management function continues to deliver business as usual, in the context of no reduction in planning applications submitted through the year. The development industry is clearly preparing to build itself

outside of the current downturn of the economy due to the pandemic. There has also been an upturn in the numbers of householder applications for changes to residences to meet homeworking needs and in response to the buoyant housing market brought about by the Stamp Duty Holiday. This has also meant that our Building Control Team is busily dealing with applications for extensions and changes of uses from garages and such like to new rooms and home offices.

The pandemic has brought the challenges of virtual Planning Committees, and Uttlesford has been one of the leaders in the County in the delivery of virtual meetings of Planning Committee from very early on in the pandemic, in May 2020. Given the Government's insistence that Committee meetings now need to be held physically, we have now had held three (commencing in May and including that of July). These have been of a hybrid nature with the Committee and Lead Officer being present in the Chamber, and officers and public dialling in (with an option for speakers to attend in person). Due to the restrictions on the May and June Committee in terms of time allowed in the chamber, Committee has not been able to progress as many cases as normal, which itself has created a backlog. Hopefully, the doubling up with the two-day Planning Committee on 7 & 8 July will clear this backlog. The hybrid meetings have worked well both technologically and in terms of decision making and successful community participation. As with the move to virtual meetings in Spring 2020, UDC were first in the County to hold meetings in a combined physical/remote/hybrid manner.

Members will be aware of the Planning Inspectorate's decision to allow MAG's appeal for the grant of planning permission for the Stansted Airport extension and the award of costs against the Council. The council now has the right to seek a review of the Panel's decision by the High Court under S288 TCPA 1990 as amended. This is a two-stage process and Counsel has advised that the Council should initiate such a review, but consider its position once again in the light of the outcome of the preliminary application. This step must be taken by July 8th but we would not anticipate any result until well into September at the earliest. As soon as we have an update on this we will share it with all members.

Officers continue to deal with the full range of planning applications and pre-application discussions ranging from rear extensions to proposals for major new housing developments. We continue to encourage developers to enter into Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs), which of course generate fees payable to the Council, and by this means, we can also engage the town and parish councils and the local communities in planning proposals before formal applications are submitted. By doing this, we are already finding that developers are hearing what members and local community representatives think about the initial proposals advanced and in many cases, the developers are amending their applications to take on board these initial comments. As part of this early engagement, developers are also encouraged to take their proposals to the Essex Quality Design Panel for an external peer review of

their proposals – again with the view to address potential issues, particularly in relation to design, before their planning application is submitted. This approach is becoming the default approach and should bear dividends as better framed planning applications emerge on this. One example of this was the successful reporting and approval of the two sites north of Woodside Way, Great Dunmow, where the early and continued engagement of the community and reliance on high quality design resulted in a scheme embraced by the community and the Planning Committee.

Progress has been made with the reporting to Scrutiny Committee on 26 May, of the Task and Finish Group Study on Section 106s. This will finally inform the Council's improved approach to Section 106s, including community involvement, consistency of approach and maximising the delivery of infrastructure through emerging development. This work will run parallel with the audit of Section 106s in terms of sustainability processes and robustness of data as we move towards a public facing for Section 106 matters.

Due to various challenges, the Planning Enforcement Team is currently not working to full capacity. The expectation of Enforcement from the community is still very high, possibly unrealistically high. Due to officers not being to visit site for much of the lockdown periods there is a backlog of cases, and this is not of their making. The catching up of these cases has, frustratingly, coincided with the current challenges which result from a mix of unfilled vacancies and sickness. We aim to fill the vacancies before the end of the Summer. The Planning Enforcement Team Leader, herself just returning from maternity leave, is committed to establishing better processes for community notification of cases and better use of the Council's Uniform process.