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LOCAL PLAN LEADERSHIP GROUP held at ZOOM on WEDNESDAY, 9 MARCH 2022 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor G Bagnall (Chair)
Councillors M Caton, R Freeman, M Lemon, B Light, J Lodge,
S Merifield, R Pavitt, N Reeve, M Sutton and M Tayler

Officers in attendance: C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer), J Hill (Planning Policy Officer) and S Miles (Local Plans and New Communities Manager).

Guest (non-voting): Councillor J Evans

Also present: Giles Tofield (Cultural Engine)

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

There were no apologies for absence. Councillor Lodge declared a non-pecuniary interest relating to item number 4, as a trustee of Saffron Hall and said he was also working with a Community Interest Company (CIC) at Fairycroft House.

2 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2022 were approved.

3 **SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY PAPER**

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager presented the report. He said the paper looked to identify the function of settlements within Uttlesford District Council (UDC) in terms of their size, form, economic and retail roles as well as the services and facilities available in the settlement. He said that the report was a snapshot in time.

He said that the purpose of identifying a settlement hierarchy was to inform the spatial strategy for the Local Plan, and ensure it focused on housing and economic growth in the most sustainable areas.

The key difference in the hierarchy from the withdrawn Local Plan to this emerging Local Plan was Stansted Mountfitchet's proposed classification in the top tier of the hierarchy.

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager agreed to look at and amend if necessary the following: -

- Page 13 1.7 – Harlow would be added as a nearby town.
- Page 17, 1.31 – rephrased to clarify the terms local rural centres and rural centres.
- Page 20 – The hotel in Great Chesterford was counted as a bar in the number of pubs within that area, however it was for guests only.
- Page 12, 1.1 would be looked at again and the paragraph expanded to explain the purpose and usage of the settlement hierarchy.
- Appendix 1, Hatfield Heath has 1 allotment not 2. The Post Office was closed, a van came for an hour a week. There was only 1 hourly bus route.
- Stebbing did not have an hourly bus service.

The following was also noted: -

The statement on page 13, 1.8 and 'the particular importance of London Stansted Airport and its role within the South Cambridgeshire research and bio-technology cluster'. The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said there was no specific evidence provided for who was using the airport, however a Business Survey had been carried out by the consultants working on the employment detail.

There was discussion about weighting as a way to determine where developments would occur on page 16, 1.24. The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that this would not be based on a formulaic approach but would be looked at in a holistic way, considering all factors.

The Chair said that the decisions made could not be constrained by weighting, he said all the evidence and advice would be considered and Members would make a judgement and a final decision.

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that part of the purpose of the report was to help Members understand the professional Planning Officers expertise and knowledge. He said the judgements were then open for discussion and questioning. He said the purpose of the Leadership Group was to take the lead on the Local Plan and inform its development.

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that the report was a snapshot in time but significant changes to the data which were likely to result in a change to the hierarchy would be updated.

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said he would make the changes and circulate an updated version.

CULTURE, CREATIVITY AND THE ARTS EVIDENCE BASE

The Planning Policy Officer introduced the item and said it provided a report and baseline database of venues and organisations within the district and formed part of the evidence for the Local Plan.

Giles Tofield from Cultural Engine presented the report. He said it showed the cultural and social infrastructure needs of the district and had wider implications for business development.

He said the database provided an insight into the main issues, opportunities and challenges relevant to the culture and arts.

Councillor Light said that on page 31, 1.2 the majority of cultural spaces were run on a voluntary basis, or were community led. She said that there needed to be a cohesive approach to the arts and more input from UDC with funding and support made available.

Councillor Caton said there were gaps in the provision of art and culture which were not highlighted. He said there was a need to look proactively at where the deficits were and how to rectify them.

Giles Tofield said that the cultural strategy would look in more detail at what residents wanted and the needs within each area.

Councillor Lodge said that the report noted at 10.2 and 17.7 that UDC gave almost no funding to the arts apart from to the Museum in Saffron Walden. He said that the Local Plan needed to drive forward investment.

He said that Fairycroft House run by a CIC and Essex County Council was a modern building and a large space which was not fully utilised.

Councillor Merifield said that any process of organisation of the arts should be looked at across the whole district and needed to be fair to all areas.

In response to a question from Councillor Merifield about historical societies, Giles Tofield said that he had engaged with the Recorders of Uttlesford History (RUH) and that they had an extensive network across the district that was often overlooked as an asset.

The Planning Policy Officer said that there was a potential role for the Council and an investment opportunity to boost the rural economy in terms of arts and culture.

Councillor Reeve said that a new website had been launched called 'Discover Uttlesford' which aimed to link retail, hospitality and tourism sectors across the district. He asked if the report could be updated to include this and correct the change of the website name.

In response to a question from Councillor Reeve about the cultural strategy, the Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that not all recommendations in

the report would be included in the Local Plan. He said the cultural strategy was a separate document that the Council, through the Economic Development and Communities team, would progress.

Giles Tofield said that he would make the changes relating to 'Discover Uttlesford', and he said that the baseline database had already been incorporated into the Local Plan.

Councillor Tayler said that the tourist information in the district was currently weak, and that it needed to be more co-ordinated, tourist friendly and welcoming.

5 **MOTION TO COUNCIL ON AN EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR THE LOCAL PLAN – DISCUSSION PAPER**

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that Full Council on 22 February had considered a motion for a possible evaluation framework for the Local Plan. The motion had been lost, but some members agreed with the sentiment. The Chair had asked that a paper be brought to this group to facilitate Member discussion.

He said the report reminded Members that the framework used by the Inspector examining the plan would relate to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the associated soundness tests within.

He said that Members had already put together a draft vision and objectives which had been endorsed by Cabinet last year and could be used as a starting point.

Councillor Light said the purpose of the framework would be to consider the Local Plan in terms of green issues and ensure that it was environmentally sound. She said that this was in line with the NPPF, chapter 2 which highlighted 3 key issues, social progress, economic wellbeing and environmental protection. She said it was important to use experts and there were examples of organisations that had already produced frameworks that could be consulted.

The Chair said that the use of borrowed policies from other districts who had already developed a 'green' Local Plan would be useful as these had already been tested and proven and had supporting documentation.

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that they wanted to produce a 'green' Local Plan and asked that any examples of best practice from other Council's or policy areas that Members wanted to cover would be very useful.

In response to a question from Councillor Caton the Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that the policies would be monitored by having an annual Authority Monitoring report and within this, a new framework to monitor emerging policies from the new Local Plan. He said it would evolve over time and would include the development of supplementary planning documents

alongside the main documents within the Local Plan. He said these would be easier to update going forward.

Councillor Merifield said that it was important to keep to the Local Plan timescale and to ensure that the policies were acceptable to the NPPF and Inspectors.

The Chair said that the Local Plan needed to help to meet the net zero ambitions. He said that next steps would be discussed outside the meeting but background research from Councillors would be very helpful.

6 **FIRST HOMES PLANNING ADVISORY NOTE**

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager presented the report. He said that new government legislation which came into effect on the 28th March 2022 stated that 25% of affordable homes had to be first homes. He said they needed to be discounted by a minimum of 30% of market value, sold for no more than £250k and would only be available to eligible people. He said there would be restrictions to ensure that the discount was passed onto future purchasers. The implementation of the policy would be monitored. He recommended that the report was endorsed for approval at Cabinet.

The following was noted: -

- The new legislation related to any scheme that had an affordable homes element, so an application with 40% affordable homes would have 25% of that figure required as first homes.
- There was concern that the £250k limit would be difficult to reach because of the value of houses within the district. The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that within the document, at 1.5, it stated that local authorities would be given discretion to require a higher minimum discount of either 40% or 50% if they could demonstrate the need.
- The Local Plan and New Communities Manager said that this was government legislation and had to be adopted, but there was some scope to have local eligibility criteria and some nuance could be added.
- Councillor Caton said that this reduced flexibility and created a problem as it would reduce the amount of shared ownership homes of 3 bedrooms and above.

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager clarified that it would be 25% of affordable homes secured. He suggested that it was monitored once there was a year's worth of data.

Councillor Evans said that these recommendations were based on the current position and suggested that additional work might be needed in the future with views taken from other local authorities and advice from the Local Government Association (LGA).

The Leadership Group recommended that the report went ahead to Cabinet and was reviewed in six months.

AUTHORITY MONITORING REPORT

The Local Plan and New Communities Manager presented the report. He said the report monitored progress against the targets within the policies from the 2005 Local Plan as well as other planning matters that the Council was required to monitor. It had not been produced since 2014 but would form a framework to allow for the report to be carried out on an annual basis and would consider the emerging Local Plan policies.

The Chair suggested that any comments were sent to the Local Plan and New Communities Manager outside of the meeting. He said it was a framework for the future and could be used to monitor the Local Plan going forward.

It was agreed that the report would be published once the Local Plan and New Communities Manager had received and reviewed any comments or questions from Members.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm