

**LOCAL PLAN LEADERSHIP GROUP held at COUNCIL CHAMBER -  
COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on  
THURSDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2022 at 7.30 pm**

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

Officers in attendance: J Clements (Interim Local Plan and New Communities  
Manager), J Dewar (Principal Planning Policy Officer - Temp),  
D Hermitage (Director of Planning), P Holt (Chief Executive) and  
C Shanley-Grozavu (Democratic Services Officer)

Also Present: Councillors N Gregory (Chair of Scrutiny Committee) and P Lees  
(Leader of the Council)

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

There were no apologies for absence and no declarations of interest.

Introductions were made by the Director of Planning on behalf of the officers  
present from the Local Plan Team.

**2 SCRUTINY UPDATE**

Councillor Gregory provided a summary on the discussions from the meeting of  
the Scrutiny Committee which had met before the Local Plan Leadership Group  
(LPLG).

A copy of the report received by the Scrutiny Committee has been appended to  
the minutes of the meeting.

**3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The following minutes were approved as a correct record:

- 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022
- 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022
- 10<sup>th</sup> October 2022 (Extraordinary Joint Session with Scrutiny Committee)

Councillor Caton said that during the extraordinary joint session with Scrutiny  
Committee, he may have implied that the Chief Executive had acted in a party-  
political manner. He did not regard this as his true view, and has since apologised  
to the Chief Executive.

He expressed his concerns with the oversight arrangement and felt that they  
needed to be debated and agreed by both the LPLG and Scrutiny Committee,

rather than delegating responsibility to the Chairs. The Chair responded that it was the responsibility of Scrutiny to agree the process, but requested that Democratic Services look into the constitution to provide clarity.

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## **THE LOCAL PLAN CHALLENGE AND OVERVIEW OF DRAFT PLAN PREPARATION PROGRAMME**

The Interim Local Plans and New Communities Manager gave a verbal presentation on the challenges of preparing a Local Plan in the district of Uttlesford. In addition, he provided an outline for the new programme for drafting the documentation for the emerging plan.

Members discussed the content of the verbal presentation, and the following was noted:

- The recent announcement by major developers to reduce build would affect the delivery of new Local Plan, but this was a common occurrence in Planning and the Plan would make assumptions that the economy would fluctuate. However, as a Local Planning Authority, the Council were not in a position to control the Planning Market, nor was it possible to mitigate, as there would always be upswings and downswings during the duration of the plan. They hoped that the downturn in the economy and subsequent slowdown in deliverable rates eased long before 2040.
- The Site Proformas previously produced were now outdated and the process would be rerun. During this time, comments made by stakeholders would be revisited.
- The Local Plan team were not intending to have ongoing consultation with Parish Councils, as this would be too resource heavy without a clear output. However, the publication of the Draft Local Plan in summer 2023 would be the appropriate opportunity for their further comments to contribute into the process, along with those from other key stakeholders.
- Whilst Uttlesford was a district rural in character, it was important to consider the challenges and opportunities from its position in the wider area within the South-East.
- Concerns around importance of preserving heritage within its sense of place were noted.
- A decision had not yet been made regarding the Hierarchy of Settlements and whether this would be amended, but this would be reviewed.
- There would be input from the Development Management team around reviewing the policies for the new Local Plan.
- Members requested further discussion of what is meant by evidence in planning terms; in particular where factual evidence ends, and planning judgement comes in. Officers clarified that most of planning was about judgement, based on the evidence obtained, but that evidence alone would not determine what decisions should be made.

During discussion, officers clarified that they were unable to publish the proposed site allocations before the 2023 Local Elections, in line with LGA and Cabinet Office advice not to publish or hold contentious consultations during the pre-election period. Due to timings, they were also not in a position to complete and publish their proposals in the period before the onset of pre-election period.

In addition, officers acknowledged the huge amount of work and effort contained so far but explained that it was not in a presentable form for consultation. Moving forward, the aim for the team was to sense check where they were, reassess the work and give clear justification for their recommended options.

The Local Plan Leadership Group noted the update.

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## **WRITTEN METHODOLOGIES FOR SITE AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT (SLAA) AND SITE SELECTION PROCESSES**

The Interim Principal Local Plans and New Communities Officer gave a presentation on the written methodologies for the Site Availability Assessment and the Site Selection Processes.

In response to questions, officers clarified the following:

- The amended methodologies would create an audit trail for how officers came to their decisions. Whilst the justifications were clear in previous work, this was not reflected within the accompanying paperwork. This included a need to show great clarity around the classifications of sites and whether they were deliverable.
- The sustainability appraisals, provided by external consultants, would assist officers in making their judgements by allowing them to weigh up the positive and negative attributes of each potentially developable site.
- Work on Stage One of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) had already commenced, and officers were intending to revisit the work done within the previous proformas.
- The Transport Assessments would examine both the current pinch points within the district and the cumulative impact of anticipated traffic growth to 2040, alongside the effect which sites for potential development would have. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan would address any possible transport-related issues which may have arisen within the emerging Local Plan, including the scale of infrastructure improvements needed to accommodate new development.
- The current stage of the site methodology intended to consider and assess possible sites that were developable. The later stages would then apply judgements on possible settlements and whether they complied with the visions and principles of the emerging Local Plan.
- To ensure consistency in the approach to site assessments, the Local Plan team were working collaboratively to refine the methodology as well as following the parameters of national guidance, which did not give a great level of flexibility to deviate from definitions.
- The current evidence from the road transport studies suggested that there were no easy solutions to addressing the road network which was already near or at capacity.
- The processes involved work which was driven both by the team and through computer systems.

Members raised concerns about possible infrastructure projects being unrealistic and unfeasible, particularly due to funding. Officers responded that the emerging

Local Plan needed to be both deliverable and viable, and that the feasibility studies in train would provide evidence in this regard.

The Local Plan Leadership Group noted the report.

## 6 **UPCOMING LOCAL PLAN TEAM PUBLICATIONS**

The Interim Local Plans and New Communities Manager provided an update on the upcoming documents which the Local Plan Team intended to publish in the near future.

The Chair requested that any comments or suggestions be sent by email to the Interim Local Plan and New Communities Manager.

Any questions about factual inaccuracies would be recorded, but the information within the published documentation was not up for ongoing dispute.

The Local Plan Leadership Group noted the report.

*Meeting ended 21 35*