

Note on Consideration of Public Speaker Comments of the Local Plan Panel Meeting of 10 April 2024

At the 19 April meeting of the LPP a number of notable and relevant points were raised by four public speakers.

Tim Bradshaw (on behalf of Littlebury Residents Group) asked whether Littlebury was likely to be re-defined as a 'larger village' (Members will recall that at the February meeting of the LPP the emerging proposals for 'larger villages' and the assessment of villages and where they sit in the settlement hierarchy was discussed). The reassessment of the settlement hierarchy has not resulted in any villages being moved up to the 'larger villages' classification. Thus, it is not proposed that Littlebury is re-classified.

Parish Cllr Graham Mott (Elsenham PC) made a number of points. The time between Regulation consultation closing (18 December 2023) and the comments being published (11 March 2024) was questioned. The period was just under 10 working weeks. This is quicker than would normally be the case in a local plan process. Many authorities do not publish comments until the Regulation 19 documents are released. Comments regarding the "clunky" consultation response system were noted and as a result officers, along with the Cabinet Member for Planning, have reviewed a number of software systems to assess possible improvements and options in readiness for the Regulation 19 consultation.

The speaker also raised the Countryside Protection Zone (CPZ) and noted that many houses have been permitted within it since its inception and stated that Planning Inspectors have allowed some 130 homes within it in that parish just last year. The CPZ has been raised on consultation and is thus a substantive item on the LPP agenda for 8 May 2024. The speaker requested administrative access to the consultation portal however, this is not appropriate and only certain officers of the council have administrative rights to amend the system.

Parish Cllr Jackie Cheetham (Takeley PC) raised the issue of transport from Takeley to Stansted Airport Railway station and requested a meeting. The transport evidence is still being considered and the outcome will be included within the Regulation consultation documents. Similarly, the viability of plan proposals are being considered by leading consultants in readiness for the end of June 2024. The speaker also raised the CPZ which is now a substantive item on the LPP agenda for 8 May 2024. An informal meeting has been arranged with the speaker to help clarify some matters.

Cllr Bagnall (district Cllr Takeley) sent a written statement. This raised concerns with there being no substantive papers tabled at the April meeting; a point which has now been discussed at Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and full Council. The also statement questioned why a new community is not being considered as per previous local plans. This was discussed ahead of Regulation 18 and reasons considered in the published Sustainability Appraisal. One of the reasons there is no proposed new community is that there is no longer a numerical need for one in this local plan period owing to the significant number of homes that have come forward in the absence of a plan. As such, officers have not been encouraging major site promoters to draw up plans for entire new communities.

The statement questions evidence and response to comments raised on consultation, specifically by ECC. This is being worked on however, work in draft and unfinished work is not published for reasons previously set out at LPP meetings. The statement also questions

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whether officers are dictating the route forward to Members. Indeed, members have provided strategic direction to officers and the plan is being drawn up in response to that.

Cllr Foley (district Cllr Thaxted and ECC Cllr) thanked the LPP and officers for improved communication on plan matters. However, stated that district Cllrs were not aware of the detail provided to Parish Councils at a recent meeting of Larger Village PCs. This is noted. The larger villages allocations are for PCs themselves to lead should they so wish and so matters were discussed directly with the PCs, with an informal briefing also provided to LPP. It was considered that the PCs should be given the latest information at the earliest opportunity. However, the point on juggling communications, and to whom, is well made and noted.

Thaxted PCs Regulation 18 response was raised and officers have since reviewed this again. The timetable was also questioned and while it is certainly most challenging, it is achievable. Indeed, slipping materially from the LDS table raises the risk of government intervention significantly.