

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE PANEL
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON THURSDAY
26 JULY 2012, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M Carver (Chairman)
Councillors L Haysey.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Andrews, W Ashley,
E Bedford, R Beeching, E Buckmaster,
Mrs R Cheswright, K Crofton, J Demonti,
T Herbert, G Jones, P Moore, M Newman,
T Page, M Pope, N Poulton, J Ranger,
S Rutland-Barsby, N Symonds, J Wing and
C Woodward.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

John Careford	- Senior Planning Officer
Martin Ibrahim	- Democratic Services Team Leader
Martin Paine	- Senior Planning Officer
Laura Pattison	- Assistant Planning Officer
Jenny Pierce	- Senior Planning Officer
Claire Sime	- Planning Policy Team Leader
Katie Simpson	- Assistant Planning Officer
Kevin Steptoe	- Head of Planning and Building Control Services
Bryan Thomsett	- Planning Policy Manager

1 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed the press and public and advised that the meeting was being webcast.

He reminded the meeting of the planning policy process and the role of the Panel in making recommendations, via the Executive, for Council to determine. The Panel noted the timetable of meetings later in 2012 which would lead to Council approving a draft District Plan for public consultation to begin in January 2013. The Chairman reiterated the stepped approach that was being taken in order that a robust Plan could be developed. He referred to other Authorities that had run into difficulties and it would be important for the Council to avoid these pitfalls.

The Chairman expressed his concerns with the delays in receiving the decision on the appeals relating to the Bishop's Stortford schools called in by the Secretary of State and of the abolition of the East of England Plan.

The Chairman also referred to the new standards regime implemented on 1 July 2012, and the requirement for Members to be clear and precise in declaring any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests. In order to avoid public misconceptions, Members needed to declare any relationships with developers, landowners, builders, agents, etc. He emphasised that the process was open and transparent and that there were no "deals behind the scenes". Members were reminded that under the new standards regime, such dealings were now a criminal offence and he suggested that, if any member of the public had any evidence of wrongdoing they should notify the police.

Finally, the Chairman commented that the planning policy process was not about housing, but was more concerned about sustainability, economic development, the environment and maintaining and improving the quality of life in East Herts.

2 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Panel meeting held on 29 March 2012, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor R Beeching gave notice of a pecuniary interest in 4 Newports, High Wych, which was referred to in the agenda documents.

4 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (LDS) VERSION 4 (AUGUST 2012)

The Panel considered a report outlining Version 4 of the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS), the schedule and work programme that set out when and how the Council would prepare its Development Plan Documents (DPD), namely the District Plan. If approved, it would replace the recently agreed LDS Version 3 - May 2012.

The Panel noted that Version 3 of the LDS had set out a very challenging timetable for the preparation of the District Plan, which was dependent upon the following three key milestones being achieved:

- the decision by the Secretary of State in respect of the planning appeal into the relocation of two secondary schools on Green Belt land to the south of Bishop's Stortford;
- the abolition of the East of England Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS); and
- satisfactory completion of Hertfordshire-wide technical work in respect of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

The Panel was advised that each of these milestones had been delayed necessitating updating the timetable within the LDS. It was emphasised that these delays were out of

the Council's control.

The Panel recommended the LDS Version 4 as now submitted.

RECOMMENDED - that the Local Development Scheme (LDS) Version 4 – August 2012, attached at Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report submitted, be supported to take effect from 8 August 2012.

5 **SUB-DISTRICT POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD FORECASTS – PARISH GROUPINGS AND TOWNS: PHASE 1 (MAY 2012)**

The Panel considered a report setting out the findings of Phase 1 of the Sub-District Population and Household Forecasts technical work that would form part of the evidence base for generating an appropriate District-wide housing target for East Herts to 2031, and would inform the preparation of the District Plan. It also provided demographic information at parish grouping and town level.

The Panel noted that Edge Analytics Ltd had been appointed in March 2012 to undertake population and household forecasting technical work at the sub-district level. This technical work would be undertaken in two phases: Phase 1 provided 'trend-led' demographic information, whilst Phase 2 would test a range of alternative dwelling-based scenarios at the sub-district level. This would enable comparison of the possible housing targets against the 'trend-led' scenarios to understand the potential demographic and housing implications of meeting those housing targets. It was noted that Phase 2 was expected to be undertaken in August 2012.

Councillor G Jones commented on the relationship between trends analysis and forecasting and whether the numbers could be accepted at face value. Officers

responded by emphasising that the forecasts were evidence based and that sustainability tests were at the core of the process.

In response to questions by Councillors Mrs R Cheswright and J Wing, Officers confirmed their confidence levels in the data, which referenced a number of informed sources such as the Office of National Statistics, census data, the electoral register, GP registrations, etc. The document issued for public consultation would include approximate numbers.

The Panel supported the technical study as now submitted.

RECOMMENDED - that the Sub-District 'Population and Household Forecasts - Parish Groupings and Towns: Phase 1' (May 2012) technical study as detailed at Essential Reference Paper 'C' of the report submitted, be supported as part of the evidence base for the preparation of the East Herts District Plan.

6 **STRATEGIC LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT – STAGE 2 – UPDATE REPORT**

The Panel considered a report updating Members on the progress of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment, which sought to identify a District-wide interim SLAA Round 2 dwelling capacity figure to be used to inform ongoing work in developing the District Plan: Part 1 - Preferred Strategy.

It was noted that Round 2 had applied a site size and location threshold and only considered those sites where there was currently no in-principle objection to their development, i.e. those sites which were located within the development boundaries of the Six Main Settlements and Category 1 Villages. This schedule of 233 sites had been previously agreed by Members. Following the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework, it

was considered appropriate to exclude some sites from this round of the SLAA process, as detailed in the report now submitted. An updated schedule of sites that were assessed was detailed at Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report submitted.

The Panel also noted the outcome of the stakeholder engagement, the details of which had been posted on the Council's website alongside Officer's initial site assessments. The initial assessments identified capacity of 2,173 dwellings District-wide over a 15 year period. A preliminary assessment of the feedback received did not indicate any material impact on the emerging interim Round 2 dwelling capacity. All comments received would be considered and amendments made, as appropriate, before a final SLAA Round 2 report would be published after being endorsed by Council later this year.

The Panel supported the recommendations as now detailed.

RECOMMENDED – that (A) the feedback received from stakeholders as part of Round 2: Stakeholder Engagement of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) be considered and amendments made as appropriate, before a final SLAA Round 2 report is published; and

(B) the use of the District-wide interim SLAA Round 2 capacity of 2,173 dwellings to inform ongoing work in developing the District Plan: Part 1 - Preferred Strategy, be supported.

7 **DISTRICT PLAN PART 1 – STRATEGY SUPPORTING DOCUMENT – UPDATE REPORT**

The Panel considered a report which reminded Members of the work already agreed on the District Plan strategy selection process, and provided an update on minor changes to the proposed methodology and document content. The Panel also considered a proposed Appendix

to the Strategy Supporting Document, focusing on suggested additions to the list of documents which would be considered as part of the evidence base.

The Panel's attention was drawn to Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report submitted, which detailed the stepped approach to strategy selection. This had been simplified and updated from the version submitted to the previous meeting.

Officers advised that in order to demonstrate the transparency of the process and to provide an audit trail, it was proposed to summarise the evidence base in a series of appendices.

In response to Members' questions on the strategic planning issues of education and water, Officers commented on the iterative process and the need to apply tests on sustainability and infrastructure.

The Panel supported the recommendations as now detailed.

RECOMMENDED – that (A) Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report submitted, containing the latest version of the 1-page summary of the Stepped Approach to strategy selection for the District Plan, be supported; and

(B) the approach to the Audit Trail, be supported, subject to a period for Member comment on the proposed Appendix B: Documents and Feedback, until 31 August 2012.

8 **DISTRICT PLAN PART 1 – STRATEGY SUPPORTING DOCUMENT – MATERIAL CHANGES TO DRAFT TOPIC ASSESSMENTS**

The Panel considered proposed updates concerning material changes made to the Draft Topic Assessments, which would form part of the emerging Supporting

Document to the draft District Plan: Part 1 - Strategy. These updates replaced the iterations that were reported to the Local Development Framework Executive Panel on 29 March 2012. A schedule of the proposed material change revisions to the Draft Topic Assessments was detailed at Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report submitted.

Officers advised that the assessment criteria for the 'Land Availability' Topic Assessment had been slightly changed from assessing land availability for 500 dwellings at a density of 20 dwellings per hectare (dph) to 25dph. This density was considered to be a more realistic planning assumption for development of this scale and was more consistent with criteria used in the Strategic Land Availability Assessment.

Other revisions had also been made in respect of Highways Infrastructure and the 'Noise Impacts' Topic Assessment. The Maintaining Tranquillity Topic Assessment (which assessed noise and light impacts) had been deleted in its entirety.

In response to a request from Councillor J Wing, an additional recommendation providing Members with time to comment on the Material Changes until the 31 August 2012, was supported.

The Panel supported the recommendations as now detailed.

RECOMMENDED – that (A) the Material Changes to the Draft Topic Assessments attached at Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report submitted, be supported as replacements to those reported to the Local Development Framework Executive Panel on 29 March 2012, subject to a period for Member comment until 31 August 2012; and

(B) their use be supported as an element of the emerging Supporting Document to the draft District

Plan: Part 1 – Strategy.

9 DISTRICT PLAN PART 1 – STRATEGY SUPPORTING DOCUMENT – CHAPTER 4: PLACES AND NEXT STEPS

The Panel considered a report explaining the obligations of East Herts Council under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It presented the latest round of work on the agreed strategy selection process and sought agreement to commence further assessment of a list of possible alternative greenfield development options, as a basis for the final stages of strategy selection.

The Panel was advised that in order to produce a “sound” plan, the Council would be obliged to adhere to processes and procedures which had been designed and agreed by the Council to robustly demonstrate compliance with the NPPF. Many Local Planning Authorities had recently found their proposed strategies declared unsound, and had therefore had to rewrite their plans in order to achieve compliance. The Stepped Approach to strategy selection already agreed by the Council provided the basis for compliance.

The Panel noted that the agreed range of figures for housing need was between and 10,000 - 17,000 dwellings over 20 years. Based on the interim Strategic Land Availability Assessment figure of around 2,000 dwellings within the Built Up Areas of existing settlements, this was still likely to leave a shortfall of between 8,000 and 15,000 dwellings over the period. Therefore, the Panel was advised of the options, mostly comprising Greenfield development outside current settlement boundaries, which would need to be assessed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

A number of Members made comments and asked questions relating to the sieve assessments. Officers advised that it was essential for the Council to be able to demonstrate that the options had been fully tested and subjected to rigorous challenge. In respect of villages, it

was noted that parish councils could look at figures higher than 10% if they wished, via the NPPF provisions for Neighbourhood Plans. Regarding major settlements on the borders of the District, it was noted that the “duty to cooperate” required the Council to assist neighbouring Authorities and to look objectively at their plans.

In respect of new settlements, Councillor M Newman expressed concern over the process used in the assessments and the conclusions reached. He quoted an extract from the report which stated that the evaluations were informed by the assessments but were not based on rigid application of the scoring system. This suggested to him that the process was not transparent and raised many questions about commercial influences. In particular, he questioned the conclusions reached for the Area 69: Hunsdon Area and queried why this option had “more potential” than other new settlement areas, given the infrastructure failings identified in the assessment.

Councillor M Newman also referred to the Issues and Options consultation, the findings of which, he believed, had been ignored, as there was no mention of it. Finally, he referred to the section references in Essential Reference Paper ‘C’ of the report submitted, which did not appear to make sense.

In response, Officers commented on the traffic light assessment and advised that the process was not rigid. It was acknowledged that there were problems with specific sites in planning terms, but they had to be assessed objectively and tested fully. A number of options would likely drop out following further sieving. The feedback from the Issues and Options consultation had not been ignored and the issues raised had been addressed in accordance with the procedure already agreed by the Council. Finally, the referencing errors in Essential Reference Paper ‘C’ would be amended.

The Panel supported the recommendations as now detailed.

RECOMMENDED - that (A) the Draft of Chapter 4: Places contained in Essential Reference Paper 'B' of the report submitted, and consisting of Sieve 1 and Sieve 2 in the strategy selection process, be supported;

(B) the scenarios presented in the report and explained in more detail in Essential Reference Paper 'C' of the report submitted, be supported for further assessment in Chapters 5 and 6; and

(C) Essential Reference Papers 'B' and 'C' of the report submitted, be supported, subject to a period of Member comment in respect of factual content, until 31 August 2012.

The meeting closed at 8.57 pm

Chairman
Date