

MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY
MEETING OF EAST HERTS COUNCIL
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 9 MARCH 2005 AT
7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D E Mayes (Chairman).
Councillors M R Alexander, W Ashley,
K A Barnes, S A Bull, A L Burlton, M G Carver,
D Clark, R N Copping, J Demonti, A D Dodd,
R Gilbert, Mrs M H Goldspink, A M Graham,
Mrs D M Hone, A P Jackson, M P A McMullen,
T Milner, Mrs S Newton, D A A Peek, L R Pinnell,
J O Ranger, D Richards, T K H Robertson,
S Rutland-Barsby, J J Taylor, M J Tindale,
J P Warren, N Wilson and M Wood.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Miranda Steward	- Executive Director (Returning Officer)
Rachel Stopard	- Executive Director (Head of Paid Service)
Simon Andrews	- Planning Officer (Environmental Planning)
Alison Brown	- Communications Officer
Simon Drinkwater	- Assistant Director (Law and Control)
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic Services
Martin Ibrahim	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Mary Orton	- Assistant Director (Policy and Performance)
Georgina Stanton	- Assistant Director (Communications and Customer Services)

Bryan Thomsett

- Head of
Environmental
Planning

656 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reported that he had spoken to Councillor D R Atkins and the good news was that he had now left hospital.

657 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D Clark declared a personal interest in the matter referred to at Minute 657 – Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England (RSS14) – Response to the Consultation Document – December 2004, as her husband was the Secretary of the Stop Harlow North Campaign.

658 REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY FOR THE EAST OF ENGLAND (RSS14) – RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT – DECEMBER 2004

The Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Economic and Regional Development submitted a joint report outlining a suggested response to the East of England Plan Consultation Document ('The Plan'). The Executive, at its meeting held earlier that evening, had considered the draft response and had supported the recommendations as now detailed.

The Executive Member for Economic and Regional Development outlined the consultation process and the Examination in Public, which would lead to the Government approving the Plan in late 2006. She stated that the Council's response needed to be in a prescribed format and would be based on that detailed at Appendix 'D' of the report now submitted.

The Executive Member referred to the campaign in raising awareness in East Herts. The comments made by residents at the various meetings attended by the Leader and herself had informed the Council's draft response. The Council's

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officers had also worked in partnership with County colleagues in studying the technical issues. The overwhelming conclusion was that the Plan represented a significant threat to the environment and quality of life in East Herts.

The overall scale of the proposals, in terms of housing growth, was not only dangerous, but also unsustainable. The economic assumptions were flawed, as the proposed growth was supposed to be jobs-led, and yet the Plan did not contain any practical strategy for achieving this outcome.

The Executive Member also referred to the growth proposals for Harlow. Although the Council supported the regeneration of Harlow, the Plan seemed to assume that housing growth would provide regeneration automatically. The Executive Member referred to advice commissioned by the Council from a firm of experts on whether the Plan was likely to achieve the economic regeneration of Harlow, as detailed in the report now submitted. These findings confirmed the view that the regeneration proposals were unrealistic.

The Executive Member also referred to the Plan's repeated description of the site north of Harlow identified for at least 10,000 houses. She emphasised that this site was in Hertfordshire in the historic parishes of Eastwick and Gilston. She detailed a number of reasons as to why this site was inappropriate for such development. Also, she suggested that the location had been chosen because of its alleged deliverability, irrespective of planning matters.

The Executive Member detailed other flaws in the Plan. In respect of Bishop's Stortford, substantial growth had already taken place in recent years resulting in an infrastructure deficit. Yet the Plan's proposals made unsupported assumptions about capacity in the town, and gave little attention to any factor other than housing. This was not sustainable development.

In respect of Stansted Airport, the Executive Member referred to the apparent confusion regarding the economic

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contribution of the airport. Recent studies had shown that low cost budget airlines made little impact on jobs growth. As few airport employees lived in Harlow anyhow, it was difficult to see how growth at Stansted would contribute to the growth in jobs required by the Plan.

The Executive Member also referred to existing transport problems within Hertfordshire without any growth. Significant investment in roads and railways were needed to cope with the current population. However, the Plan's transport strategy was dominated by road building schemes, with little focus devoted to public transport.

As far as environmental issues were concerned, the Executive Member referred to the Strategic Environmental Assessment, which suggested that the policies referred to by the Plan were unworkable and impractical. She highlighted the real problems of scarce water resources, waste disposal, the potential for flooding and mineral extraction. These issues represented serious environmental concerns for the area.

Finally, the Executive Member highlighted the serious flaws in respect of implementation of the Plan. There was a lack of realism about the extent to which developers could contribute to infrastructure costs – roads, schools, hospitals, affordable housing, etc. The lack of identified funding was a serious concern. The Executive Member referred to the lack of a mechanism to ensure the infrastructure would be in place before the housing was developed. Any delivery vehicle would need to be democratically accountable.

The Executive Member concluded by quoting from the House of Commons Environment Audit Committee, which had criticised the Government's housing plans for the South East. It had suggested that the principle beneficiaries of housing growth would be property development companies, whilst the principle loser would be the environment. She urged all Members to support the recommendations now detailed, and to respond individually to the Plan as well.

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During the debate that followed, a number of Members criticised those elements of the Plan highlighted by the Executive Member and supported the draft response as proposed.

Councillor R N Copping referred to the glasshouse industry in the Lea Valley. He asked that the Council's response include a reference to the response of the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, which sought to make it clear that references to development in the 'Lea Valley' did not include land within the Lee Valley Regional Park.

Councillor A D Dodd referred to the proposals for Harlow and supported the Executive Member's comments. He reiterated that the proposed site to the north of Harlow was Green Belt land within East Hertfordshire. This view was endorsed by a number of Members.

Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink supported the comments of the Executive Member and suggested that the Council's response should stress the positive elements of the Plan. She stated that as the Plan acknowledged infrastructure deficits, the Council should use this in its response. She also referred to car parking standards in respect of hospital visitors and asked that this be included in the Council's final response. Finally, she also expressed her disappointment that the proposed final version was not before Members at the meeting.

In response, the Executive Member stated that preparation of the final response was an ongoing process and reminded Council of the timescales involved. The draft response did acknowledge the positive elements of the Plan. However, as previously stated, these were only nice words and did not contain any realistic measures. In respect of the car parking standards for hospital visitors, the Executive Member undertook to ask officers to look at this before the Council's final response was submitted.

Councillor J O Ranger referred to the amendments to the

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Council's response proposed by the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) Scrutiny Panel. These amendments were detailed in a supplementary paper, as now submitted. He suggested that these amendments be accepted and 'toughened up' in the final response.

Councillor M Wood referred to the poor public attendance at the Council meeting and suggested that this was a sad turnout.

In response to a question from Councillor T K H Robertson, the Leader suggested that Members responding individually, should do so as constituents and not as Councillors.

Council expressed its gratitude to the Head of Environmental Planning and his team for their efforts throughout the consultation period.

The Leader concluded the debate by referring to the various challenges posed by the Plan in terms of Sustainability, Economic Development and funding. He championed the Council's role in challenging the Plan robustly and drew comparisons with the Council's recent legal challenge to the Airports White Paper. It would be important for the Council to continue its campaign beyond the consultation deadline.

Council approved the content of Appendix 'D' to the report now submitted, as a basis of the Council's response to the Plan. Also, Council approved the suggested amendments of the RSS Scrutiny Panel. Furthermore, Council agreed that the Assistant Director (Policy and Performance), in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Economic and Regional Development, be given delegated authority to agree any further amendments/additions to the Council's response, arising from the Executive and Extraordinary Council meetings on 9 March 2005.

RESOLVED - that (A) the content of Appendix 'D' to the report now submitted, as well as the amendments suggested by the RSS Scrutiny Panel, be agreed as

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the basis of East Herts Council's formal response to the East of England Plan – Consultation Draft Document – December 2004; and

(B) the Assistant Director (Policy and Performance), in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Economic and Regional Development, be given delegated authority to agree any further amendments/additions to the Council's response, arising from the Executive and Extraordinary Council meetings on 9 March 2005.

APP

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Chairman
Date

Nps\Council\Minutes 09 Mar 2005