

# **Local Plan Committee**

## **Thursday, 23 October 2014**

**Attendees:** Councillor Elizabeth Blundell (Member), Councillor Andrew Ellis (Member), Councillor John Jowers (Member), Councillor Kim Naish (Group Spokesperson), Councillor Lyn Barton (Member), Councillor Bill Frame (Chairman), Councillor Martin Goss (Deputy Chairman), Councillor Gerard Oxford (Member)

**Substitutes:** No substitutes were recorded at the meeting

### **17 Have Your Say!**

Annesley Hardy addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(3). Since she had last addressed the Committee concerning the future of the Essex County Hospital site, she had undertaken a further consultation with residents living in the roads around the hospital. The results had shown there was a need for a medical facility on the site and she asked the Committee to register this request for this part of Southern Colchester. In particular, she requested that the Development Brief be drawn up including protection for the Hospital and the Nursing Home so that the following limitations on the development would be made clear to the developers at this early stage:

- The retention of the Listed Hospital and Nursing Home buildings;
- The inclusion of a medical facility;
- Good parking for residents, local workers and clients;
- The need for a green space in Southern Colchester;
- No housing of poor quality and no rental properties.

Karen Syrett responded to Mrs Hardy by confirming that it was hoped to bring a Development Brief for the site to the Committee for consideration at its next meeting.

### **18 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 August 2014 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **19 Gypsy and Traveller Assessment // Update**

Karen Syrett presented a verbal update to the Committee giving details of the revisions made to the Essex Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment 2014 since the Committee's last meeting. Three sites in Colchester

had previously been recorded incorrectly which meant there had been a reduction of need for Colchester of nine sites from 24 to 15. This equated to three sites between 2013 and 2018, three sites between 2018 and 2023, four sites between 2023 and 2028 and five sites between 2028 and 2033.

Councillor Naish asked for details of the current levels of gypsy and traveller population in the county and Karen Syrett confirmed that she would make this available via the website.

Councillor Oxford asked about the situation in relation to transit sites, in response to which Councillor Jowers explained that the provision of transit sites made the relocation of unauthorised encampments a more straight forward process, however, no one Authority had a duty to provide such sites. He was of the view that there was little enthusiasm to identify suitable sites and that ultimately it was likely to become a duty of co-operation issue.

*RESOLVED* that the update on the Gypsy and Traveller Assessment be noted.

## **20 Northern Gateway Consultation**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Commercial Services giving details of the comments made on the consultation about the Council's proposals for development of Council-owned land in the Northern Gateway area which had been authorised by the Committee in June 2014.

Laura Chase, Planning Policy Manager, together with Vincent Pearce, Major Development Manager, explained that the consultation had included workshops at a range of venues during July and August and had attracted a total of 761 visitors. The report included a summary of the issues that were addressed at the exhibition which had been gathered by noting specific queries or points made at the workshops and by means of a questionnaire which allowed respondents to express their support or opposition to the material and to add general comments. A total of 73 responses had been returned and a summary of responses was provided in the report.

Key issues included:

- Highways and Traffic – proximity to A12 and local roads in Mile End and Boxted, the impact on the Northern Approaches Road and North Station Bridge, confidence in traffic modelling, solutions for the Weston Homes Community Stadium entrance from Boxted Road and links from the development to public transport
- Open Space and Countryside - the type of development north of the A12, which currently serves as a boundary between the urban area of Colchester and the open countryside, floodlighting nuisance, loss of open space at the Mill Road Sports Ground represents a loss of amenity for residents in the vicinity, destruction of landscape and flora, linkages to footpaths, cycle routes and bridleways and sports and leisure activities including use of the lake

- Delivery - viability constraints, conflict in expectations and desires from different sectors of the community, involvement of communities will be involved in and have influence over the evolution of the plans and the potential conflict of interest between the Council as landowner and the Council as local planning authority
- Uses and activity – no harm to the town centre or the amenity of residents, barriers to movement across the Gateway, the role and function of the hub, whether the hub would achieve expectations. In design terms, the introduction of tall buildings was questioned.

It was noted that the opinions whether they would or would not be likely to support the plans were broadly even with a handful being neutral.

The consultation feedback would be used to revise the proposals with the intention of presenting a Framework document for the Committee to adopt as a material planning consideration. The Framework document would then be used to guide consideration of any planning applications for the area.

In discussion members of the Committee raised the following issues:-

- Divided opinions regarding the merits of the relocation of the rugby club, given the use of the space by other groups such as dog walkers and an archery club and the introduction of high density housing with associated traffic problems
- The difficulty for residents in understanding and interpreting the vision for the Northern Gateway due to the number of unknown issues still remaining
- The lack of a community centre in the Mile End area and the potential for the rugby clubhouse to be used for the benefit of the wider community
- The importance of listening to local people and to understand the sensitivities about changes in the area
- The conduct and extent of the consultation was welcomed whilst acknowledging the relatively low number of comments received from the public
- The ongoing problem of traffic congestion particularly around the railway station area
- Whether consideration could be given to the inclusion of self-build elements in the development
- The potential for any development in this part of the town to increase the problems of flooding due to the underlying clay soil
- Some preference for the development of the rugby club site and access to it to be predominantly along the Axial Road side
- The potential for the horse riding community in North Colchester to secure an access route to Highwoods Country Park
- The desperate need for highway works to improve access at the roundabouts at North Station, at Wickes and at North Station Road
- Acknowledgement that Colchester continued to be one of the fastest growing towns in Essex and, as such, had an ongoing need for significantly more housing provision
- The new housing provision at the Garrison was a good example of a well planned development which had generated very few adverse comments from the community

In response to the discussion, the Planning Policy Manager and the Major Development

Manager explained that promotional material would be provided to explain the proposals in more detail but this would need to be done at a later date, once all the responses had been received. This Council and Essex County Council were working together to stimulate a shift in options for travel arrangements and the development proposals had included the provision of a lake in recognition of the need to build a sustainable urban development which would address potential surface water problems. The officer team had been encouraged by the number and range of local organisations, such as Colchester Equestrian Society, who had indicated their wish to work with the Council. The intention was to listen to the many views expressed and ideas suggested and to seek to accommodate these in a proposed Framework document for the Committee's future consideration.

Karen Syrett, Place Strategy Manager, also took the opportunity to mention the Government's self-build funding initiative which had identified eleven Local Authority areas which had compiled a register and list of self-build sites.

*RESOLVED* that the outcome of the consultation process and the next steps in the development of proposals for the Northern Gateway area be noted.

## **21 Local Plan Update**

**Councillor Naish (in respect of his membership of the Angling Trust East of England Freshwater Forum) declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(5).**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Commercial Services giving details of the progress in the development of a new Local Plan for the Borough.

Laura Chase, Planning Policy Manager explained that, since the Committee had authorised initial work on a new Local Plan for the Borough, work had been underway to commission evidence base studies, communicate and consult with infrastructure providers, Parish and Town Councils, residents associations and community groups and adjacent authorities, initiate a Call for Sites and commence a Sustainability Appraisal. This work would inform an Issues and Options consultation which was scheduled to take place in early 2015. The adopted Local Development Scheme provided the overall milestones for this process and noted the various stages that led up to the examination and adoption of the Plan in 2016/17.

Particular details were outlined in the report in relation to:

- Development of an Objectively Assessed Need figure for housing
- Production of an updated Employment Land Needs Assessment to inform the Issues and Options consultation
- Consultants Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners would produce the study to help assess the existing supply and demand for employment land as well as trends influencing future demand for employment sites in the Borough

- Meetings to assess the impact of different options for growth with infrastructure providers including Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, Essex County Council (education, social care, libraries and culture and highways), NHS England and the Clinical Commissioning Group, the Highways Agency, Network Rail, UK Power Networks, the National Grid, Parish and Town Councils and urban area community groups
- The 'duty to co-operate' with adjacent authorities, Braintree and Tendring in particular, as well as Essex County Council, to ensure a coordinated approach to future development
- The undertaking of a 'Call for Sites' to provide an opportunity for individuals and organisations to suggest sites for development, a general summary of the type and extent of proposals received was also circulated
- The publication of a Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report had generated responses from 16 organisations and one individual, the details of which were attached to the report.

Councillor Smith attended in his capacity as Councillor for St John's Ward and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Committee. He referred to St John's and Highwoods and Welshwood Park Residents Associations in St John's ward and requested that they each be invited to comment on the Local Plan process. He commented on the importance of neighbouring authorities co-operating with each other in relation to planning matters and the Local Plan process and he indicated that he had attended a meeting of Tendring District Council's Local Plan Committee and he highlighted the potentially slower progress which was being made by that Authority.

In discussion members of the Committee raised the following issues:-

- The surface water problems associated with new developments and the implications in terms of erosion to land and rivers
- The need for joint funded infrastructure solutions for the benefit of residents in developments with shared local authority responsibilities
- Acknowledgement that whilst larger sized developments had potential for greater impact on existing communities, they also provided the best opportunities for the delivery of planned infrastructure solutions
- The potential impact on the Eastern side of Colchester of proposals by Tendring District Council to encourage the development of the area of West Tendring between the A133 and the A120.

Karen Syrett, Place Strategy Manager, responded to comments made. She acknowledged the need to identify high quality employment land in order to match rising house prices and increases in the cost of living. She explained that information gathered for best practice in the 'duty to co-operate' indicated that it did not necessarily mean that Local authorities had to seek agreement on proposals and that it was acceptable to express differing points of view. She referred, as an example, to the land between the built up area of Colchester and the Borough border with Braintree District Council and the potential future need for the Council to consider whether this type of area would be acceptable for development or for infrastructure. She confirmed that she and her team were working with colleagues in Tendring and Braintree to ensure that they each

followed a consistent approach, particularly in terms of timing of consultations with residents and stakeholders.

*RESOLVED* that the work being undertaken to further the development of a new Local Plan for the Borough, together with the intention to submit the Issues and Options document for consideration at the Committee's meeting on 16 December 2014, be noted.