

# Local Plan Committee

Thursday, 20 August 2015

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

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

## 44 Have Your Say!

Tony Barker addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(3). He explained that he had taught at the University of Essex, undertaking research into Town and Country Planning. He was concerned about the quality of housing which would emerge from the forthcoming cycle of the Local Plan. He wished to urge the Committee to try hard to follow a Garden City or Garden Village design approach. He referred to the benefits of positive, rather than reactive, planning and the architecture and layout approach to policy, associated with the Essex Design Guide. He advocated the use of Architectural Layout principles, loosely described as the Garden City/Village, explaining that Developers were open to strong design principles in order to avoid appeals, whilst appeal Inspectors also had a duty to follow policies, both national and local. He was aware the Council would need to make difficult decisions around allocations and, if the design quality is of merit, the decisions will be seen as being of long term benefit for the Borough.

Councillor Cope attended and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Committee. He referred to the Irvine Road Orchard site, a designated area of open space in the Local Plan which had been the subject of a submission by the owner in relation to the Council's Call for Sites exercise. He was of the view that the site should not be considered by the Committee within the Call for Sites process on the grounds that the orchard was over 100 years old with large ecological and historical significance, it was an important local space for wildlife and it also provided local children with an outside resource. He referred to 300 objections on the Council's website and a petition containing 400 signatures. His view was that there was no good reason for the designation of the site to be changed and, on behalf of the local community and the Irvine Road Residents Association, he urged the Committee to reject it for inclusion in the Call for Sites process.

The Chairman thanked Mr Barker and Councillor Cope for their representations. He explained to Councillor Cope that the Committee was obliged to follow the due statutory process for the assessment of all Call for Sites submissions and, as such, it was not open to the Committee to reject any sites until that assessment had been completed.

**45 Minutes of 27 May 15**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 May 2015 were confirmed as a correct record.

**46 Minutes of 8 June 2015**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2015 were confirmed as a correct record.

**47 Update on the new Local Plan**

**Councillor Jowers (in respect of his membership of the Essex County Council Development and Regulation Committee and his former membership of the East of England Local Plan Panel) 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 made on preparation of Preferred Options for the new Local Plan.

Laura Chase, Planning Policy Manager, presented the report and, together with Karen Syrett, Place Strategy Manager, responded to Councillors questions.

Laura explained that the Council was in the process of preparing a Preferred Options version of a new Local Plan which, once adopted, would set out the growth strategy, planning policies and land allocations for the Borough to 2032 and beyond. At the meeting of the Committee in June a report had been considered on the outcome of the Issues and Options consultation on what the Local Plan should contain and the report highlighted progress on these issues in terms of:

- Agreement on the plan's vision and objectives – workshops involving key public and private sector service delivery and infrastructure providers were to be held in September
- Development of realistic housing and employment targets for the provision of a 15-year housing land supply - the Council, working in partnership with Braintree, Chelmsford and Tendring Councils, had commissioned Peter Brett Associates to undertake assessments for the period up to 2037 to determine the levels of 'objectively assessed need' (OAN), being the total number of net additional dwellings to be provided over the plan period, both in the market and affordable sectors. The completed report had been made available on the Council's website
- Sustainability Appraisal and evaluation of potential development sites, and preparation of a Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment - Call for Sites suggestions were being assessed in terms of suitability, availability

and achievability to determine which sites would be deliverable over the plan period

- Completion of a range of evidence base work needed to inform policies and allocations, including Environmental Audits, Local Wildlife Sites study, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, work on archaeology and a Water Cycle Study update
- A Settlement Boundary Review including meetings with larger Parish Councils where there is potential for proportionate growth
- Development of draft spatial strategy and associated policies and site allocations

The OAN study undertaken by Peter Brett Associates made the following key observations about the Colchester housing market:

- Housing delivery in Colchester held up relatively well in the recession. In the reference period on which the official demographic projections were based, delivery fell below targets but not as fast as other areas. There was also a supply of land available should the market be willing to deliver more new homes, so there was no evidence of undersupply.
- Long-term changes in house prices closely followed the regional trend for the East of England. Since 2007 all other comparator areas outperformed Colchester (Essex, East of England, England)
- Colchester had relatively good affordability when compared to county and regional benchmarks.
- The OAN for Colchester was 920 new homes a year. This figure would serve as the baseline for determining housing targets in the emerging local plan for Colchester.

In discussion, Members of the Committee commented, in particular, in relation to:

- The work being done to identify the infrastructure requirements necessary to support new development
- The wide ranging factors which needed to be considered for a Garden City/Village approach
- The implications, particularly in employment terms, for Colchester in relation to recently announced funding for an additional third lane to the A12 between Chelmsford and Colchester
- The assessed housing need total of 920 per year was considered lower than previously anticipated and, as such, may take the pressure off the smaller rural areas
- The benefits to be gained from applying high standards of design in order to raise the quality of housing being built for the future
- The importance of retaining employment opportunities locally if the preference was for Colchester to not become another London dormitory town and, in this context, the implications of encouraging the use of 'brownfield' sites for housing development
- The benefits of having a Urban Green Link policy in terms of the protection of wildlife migration corridors
- Clarification regarding the current percentages of Colchester workforce commuting to London and those working locally
- The creative sector had previously been identified as the fastest growing employment sector and whether this continued to be the case

- The need for affordable housing in the town was continuing due to reduction in the number of affordable houses being delivered through the planning process
- Potential locations for the provision of additional travellers sites would need to be considered in the new Plan period
- Over a considerable period Colchester had consistently achieved the delivery of around 850 houses each year which indicated that an assessed need for 920 might be a target which was realistic for the Borough
- The implications for future housing need of the recent trend for major pension companies to make investments in buy to let property portfolios

In response to questions from the Committee members, it was explained that:

- An infrastructure delivery plan was being prepared and meetings would be taking place with transport and utilities providers to identify gaps and requirements
- Colchester had a good record in terms of employment provision locally, but it was usually considered more difficult to set job growth targets as opposed to housing targets. Additionally, this was affected by the changes taking place in the way and places that people worked and the location and type of employment land being utilised
- Consideration of the Garden City/Village principles was welcomed but would need to be undertaken beyond the scope of the current plan period
- The assessed need figure of 920 per year from the Peter Brett Associates report was subject to further work and potential change
- There was a particular size of settlement which was associated with a true Garden City but the standards associated with a Garden City were ones which would benefit all sized developments
- The principle to protect green links was supported and encouraged by officers but assistance and input from local community members in identifying such links was particularly helpful in protecting local wildlife
- The employment land needs assessment had included the creative sector within those employment sectors considered to be 'vibrant and developing'
- The percentage of people who lived and worked in the Borough had been calculated as 71% in the 2001 census whilst the Travel to Work Patterns document, published in September 2014, and based on the 2011 census indicated that 69% of employed Colchester residents worked in the Borough with 25k leaving the Borough to work, 25% of whom travelled to London.

*RESOLVED* that the update on the progress of the process of preparing a new Local Plan for the Borough be noted.

## **48 Sports Facility Strategy**

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

**Councillor Cook (in respect of his membership of the West End Bowls Club) 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 findings of the Sports Facility Strategy carried out on behalf of the Council by Knight, Kavanagh and Page (KKP).

Karen Syrett, Place Strategy Manager, presented the report, responded to questions and assisted the members in their discussions. She explained that a new Sports Facilities Strategy was required by the Council to provide evidence about sport and leisure need to inform the emerging Local Plan for Colchester to 2032. The Strategy would also enable the Council to plan and manage the future delivery of sport and leisure at its own facilities. Knight Kavanagh and Page, a Sport England approved consultancy, had been appointed in February 2014 to prepare the Strategy in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

A full audit of existing indoor and outdoor facilities was undertaken to identify current levels of provision which enabled separate Needs Assessments to be published, using 2011 Census data, estimated housing growth figures and information on potential team generation rates for various sports. The Strategy identified key challenges, issues and priorities for:

- Indoor Facilities including sports halls, swimming pools, health and fitness clubs, cycling, squash, indoor bowls and water sports.
- Playing Pitches for football, rugby, hockey, cricket, tennis, bowls and athletics.

In discussion members of the Committee referred to:

- The Strategy including no references to angling facilities in the Borough, bearing in mind the numbers of people who participated in fishing activities, the recognised beneficial effects for participants and the recent restriction of access to the River Colne in Castle Park which had provided welcome facilities for the disabled
- The need to consider how schools can continue to be made available for wider community use and for that use to be protected over time, an arrangement which wasn't always the case in respect of private finance projects
- The lack of sporting facilities in the outlying towns and villages in the Borough such as Tiptree, Wivenhoe and West Mersea
- The need for additional swimming provision to be considered for a town the size of Colchester

Karen responded to individual questions as follows:

- The Strategy had not been intended to include each individual sport, rather it had concentrated on indoor facilities and playing pitch sports as these were the activities which had a strong evidence base to address unmet need
- The background documents to the report had been published on the website and these contained much more detailed information about the work undertaken

across the whole of the Borough, together with identifying areas of under-supply

*RESOLVED* that the findings of the Sports Facility Strategy carried out on behalf of the Council by Knight, Kavanagh and Page be noted.

#### **49 Rural Exception Site Policy // Recent Experience**

**Councillor Jowers (in respect of his Vice Presidency of the Rural Community Council of Essex) declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(5).**

**Councillor Sykes (in respect of her Trusteeship of the Rosemary Almshouse Charity) declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(5).**

Michael Siggs, on behalf of the Rosemary Almshouse Charity, addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(3). He also circulated background information and a location plan in relation to the Rosemary Almshouses in London Road, Stanway. He explained that he had undertaken discussions with officers from the Council with a view to obtaining rural exception site status for the Almshouses and that, in order to progress the issue, he had been asked to provide evidence of need for older people's accommodation in Stanway. He considered there was a definite need for housing for older people and particularly for independent living accommodation for older people. He was of the view that homes were becoming unaffordable which was creating problems for people trying to find homes in which to live. As a consequence, he was proposing, in partnership with a Care Agency, the building of approximately 24 units of Lifetime Homes on the Rosemary Almshouse site which would provide additional care related options for Almshouse residents for the future.

Councillor Sykes attended and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Committee. She supported the proposals presented by Mr Siggs and referred to the Stanway Parish Plan which had identified the need for affordable homes in Stanway. The Almshouse properties provided excellent housing for the community but needed to be brought up to date. The proposal being put forward by the Trustees was for the provision of supported homes at a reduced cost for residents who wanted to stay in Stanway.

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Commercial Services giving details of the Council's recent consideration of submissions under the new rural exception site policy. Eddie Bacon, Affordable Housing Development Officer presented the report and, together with Karen Syrett, Place Strategy Manager, assisted the Committee members in their discussions.

Eddie explained that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) had introduced a change to Rural Exception Site (RES) policy by allowing the development of an appropriate number of open market sale homes to be built on RES in order to cross

subsidise the cost of providing affordable homes. As a consequence of this change two Rural Exception Sites had been granted planning permission in 2014/15, one in Dedham and one in Messing. Both schemes were submitted with viability appraisals to demonstrate that the market homes proposed were required to cross subsidise the provision of the affordable homes and the appraisals were reviewed by independent cost consultants to verify the figures. Planning Officers had reported their experience on both Rural Exception Sites had been positive, with good working relationships between all parties and the well-designed schemes proposed. It had also been beneficial having the support of relevant Parish Councils and ward Councillors. Accordingly, the two schemes had provided a template for taking forward further Rural Exception Schemes in other villages.

Councillor Ellis explained his own role in relation to the site at Messing and how working in collaboration with Karen Syrett and her team had assisted in delivering such a successful scheme. Members of the Committee welcomed the information contained in the report which demonstrated what could be achieved where there was support from the various stakeholders. Members also requested that the information be made available to Parish Councils in the Borough.

*RESOLVED* that the information relating to the recent applications under the Rural Exceptions Site Policy be noted and arrangements be made to circulate this to local Parish Clerks.