

**Extract from the minutes of the Local Plan Committee meeting of 14 December 2020**

**205. Local Plan Update**

Councillor J. Young attended and with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Committee, congratulating the Committee and officers for their diligent hard work in getting this far and stated that this Plan gave the Council the opportunity to plan for the long term. Section 1 of the Plan together with Garden Communities, was a significant step towards creating a new vision for Colchester, through providing housing and employment alongside community facilities. It would ensure that infrastructure did not lag behind development. In line with the declaration of the Climate Emergency it was important that housing developed under the Plan had sustainability built in. She stressed the importance of partnership working with other authorities and community groups and stressed that a joint approach was the way forward.

Councillor Luxford Vaughan attended and with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Committee expressing her concern that consideration of this urgent item was not democratic. The report had not been published in accordance with the statutory timeframe and publishing it as an urgent item did not allow sufficient time for members to read and consider it, or for members of the public to register to speak. The Inspector's report was 120 pages long and raised some complex issues. This was particularly difficult for members and members of the public who had a disability such as dyslexia. She felt an additional emergency meeting should have been called to meet the February deadline.

Councillor Goacher attended and with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Committee expressing his concern that the report was being taken as urgent item. This was undemocratic as a response could not be prepared in the time and the public would not have had an opportunity to Have Their Say.

Councillor Cory attended and with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Committee and asked that the issue of the Equalities Act and circulation of the report be considered by Democratic Services. He stated there would be a fuller discussion at Council and that engagement and involvement at early stages of the Local Plan process was an issue that had been raised in the work that would be on-going for this and the government's proposed changes to the planning system.

In response to the issues raised around the acceptance of this report as an urgent item, the Chair confirmed that this had been the subject of discussions with the Monitoring Officer who had advised that it was open to the Chair to accept it as an

urgent item. The Committee was being invited to consider referring Section 1 of the Local Plan to Full Council where there would be further opportunity for all members to discuss the issues.

The Committee considered a report setting out main modifications made in the Inspector's report. Ian Vipond, Strategic Director attended to present the report and assist the Committee. He explained that the letter and appendices from the Inspector had been seen in the consultation between August and October when many responses had been received and considered. Only seven technical adjustments had been made to the modifications the Inspector had initially proposed. The modifications had also been available in the public arena and given the scope of the amendments, very little had changed. The Inspector had concluded that with the amended modifications, Section 1 of the Plan was both legal and sound.

In response to questions, the Strategic Director confirmed that the decision for Council would be whether to adopt Section 1 or not to adopt. It could not make amendments. The Committee was being asked to recommend this for adoption by Council which would be at an additional meeting of full Council in February. This would be arranged to allow time for debate and consideration separate to the scheduled meeting which would focus on the Budget.

Once Section 1 was adopted, Section 2 would then be considered in 2021, the Inspector would look at dates in Spring next year and then the examination would be scheduled, with consultations, the report and modifications. The timing for adoption would likely be towards the end of the year.

In discussion, the concerns expressed about short notice and the time available to consider the report were acknowledged. However, the urgency was understood, and it was pointed out that unless Section 1 was adopted, and housing numbers agreed then the borough would be open to speculative development. Recommending the adoption to a stand-alone Council meeting would allow the issues to be fully debated, and a decision made.

Members thanked Portfolio Holders and Local Plan Committee Chairs (previous and current) for the work on the Plan. There had been a lot of consultation and now the Inspector had confirmed Section 1 meets the test of soundness and legal compliance as long as the modifications are agreed. It was noted Section 1 of the Local Plan had been seen and considered many times, and it was pointed out that the amendments to the modifications before the Committee were minimal.

The need to ensure all Councillors received the report in good time for the full Council meeting so that they were able to read it all was highlighted and the Committee were reminded of the Equalities Act. A hard copy of the Plan would be helpful, and a request was made that one be made available to all Councillors once agreed.

*RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL* (EIGHT voted FOR, ONE ABSTAINED from voting)  
that the modified Section 1 Local Plan be adopted in accordance with section 23(3)  
of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.