

**LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK COMMITTEE
22 JUNE 2009**

Present :- Councillor Nick Cope (Chairman)
Councillors Elizabeth Blundell, Robert Davidson,
Christopher Garnett, Martin Goss, Chris Hall,
John Jowers and Kim Naish

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 23 March and 20 May 2009 were confirmed as a correct record.

Councillor Lewis asked for clarification on the Site Allocation Development Plan Document. On page 116 of the document there was a comment that site S114, a parcel of land in Irvine Field adjacent to Philip Morant School, had been withdrawn by Essex County Council since the issues and consultation stages. At a recent public meeting it had been stated that this was not the case and she asked for clarification. Karen Syrett, Spatial Policy Manager, agreed to investigate the situation and notify Councillor Lewis of the position.

Councillor John Jowers (in respect of being a member of Essex County Council, the East of England Regional Planning Panel and the Regional Flood Defence Committee) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Elizabeth Blundell (in respect of her membership of Copford and Easthorpe Parish Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Christopher Garnett (in respect of his membership of Langham Parish Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Robert Davidson (in respect of his membership of Winstred Hundred Parish Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

5. Settlement Boundary Review

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration on a review of settlement boundaries. The Inspector had

supported the Core Strategy but recommended that further work be undertaken to inform the site allocations work. The information gained from this review would be added to the evidence base. The review had included a general study of villages and policies relating to rural areas; and had then considered changes to settlement boundaries, the policy of village growth restraint, completed development and development as a result of the site allocations process. The changes were substantially minor mapping errors and in Dedham the inclusion of the new community facility and affordable housing. There is one additional change on page 75, by the addition of "except for the western extension to Wyvern Farm" to paragraph 5.6.24. The reference throughout the document to the Proposals Map relates to the maps included in the Site Allocations consultation document.

Karen Syrett, Spatial Policy Manager, and Laura Chase, Planning Policy Manager, attended to assist the Committee in its deliberations.

Mr Caffrey addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(3). He objected to the boundaries at Tiptree because he considered the information in the report was incorrect. It was stated that 540 units had been completed or applications had been granted. However, his detailed study of completed builds and applications granted in Tiptree revealed the figure should be 644 which goes some way towards the Core Strategy figure of 680 units. The brownfield site known as Wilkins would add a further 73 or 113 to the total which takes it to 717. He has supporting information available and he believed the figures should be reviewed and verified. He referred to the site mentioned in paragraph 5.10.3, land at Grange Road, Tiptree; 191 objections to this site were submitted during the consultation process. The sewage connection for this site would be over ½ mile away. He requested that a decision to include this site be deferred until the figures can be confirmed.

In response the Spatial Policy Manager explained that the figures referred to in the report are minimum figures for Colchester to achieve which are allocated at regional level. Whilst the needs of residents are important, it was necessary to take account of all relevant matters. The only basis for a change at Wilkins is if another greenfield site is released for employment land which would also need to be considered.

Mr Ted Gittins addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(3). He was concerned that there had been a wholesale rejection of sites outside settlement boundaries rather than a careful evaluation of particular proposals and the needs of individual villages. The review only involved fine tuning of settlement boundaries which was interpreted as correcting drafting errors rather than sustaining local services. The Council has accepted that there is capacity to fulfil housing

needs for the next 20 years, although the report contains no information about the residual future capacity. It is impossible to assess the adequacy of existing housing land within the plan period and to know the potential in village envelopes for housing. In respect of the quotation in paragraph 2.1.4 which is a requirement set out in PPS7, he questioned whether members were satisfied that the local need had been identified.

In response the Planning Policy Manager explained that many of the remarks made by Mr Gittins had also been made during the development of the Core Strategy and that the Council's approach to limited development only in villages had been validated by the Inspector. The review considered the very small number of changes needed to settlement boundaries in that context. Many villages have developed a parish plan which will assist in bringing forward affordable schemes. In respect of market housing for villages, there are a number of such sites put forward around the edges of villages and to revise boundaries to let some in but not others is difficult in the context of the Core Strategy. In general, the review had looked carefully at each village envelope and criteria had been developed and applied consistently.

Councillor Chapman attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Committee. Table 2 contained inaccuracies for Fordham and Stour ward; he was concerned that villages had a very good shop which contains a post office. However his main point was the adverse effect that the stadium was having on Boxted. There were issues here regarding lighting, which extends towards Boxted, and in the winter months when the tree screen is absent the stadium is more visible, which together give the area an urban appearance.

In response the Planning Policy Manager explained that a comprehensive survey of village facilities had been undertaken in 2005, but for this review the parish councils had been relied upon to provide up to date information. In respect of the community stadium the wording in the report could be reviewed and if it looks to be appropriate changes could be made.

The Committee made a number of comments and Karen Syrett, Spatial Policy Manager, and Laura Chase, Planning Policy Manager, responded as indicated:-

Committee Comments – Housing targets

- the Committee must bear in mind national policy when considering the numbers of new homes to be built. All local authorities are committed to a minimum housing target set by the Regional Plan and the target for Essex has been increased from 142,000 to 196,000. The local authority does not have the ability to chose whether or not to accept the target;

- there could be too much reliance placed on the large housing allocation in North Colchester, particularly as it is itself reliant on the proposed A12 junction. The junction was meant to have been built before the Community Stadium and the scenario was raised about what would be the response if the junction did not come on stream;
- the amount of new housing that was being allocated to Colchester at the regional level was alarming and there was a suggestion that it be challenged;
- in respect of the target allocated to Colchester, there was a view that there was sufficient capacity within Colchester to avoid the need to allocate housing in villages.

Officer Response – it was explained that the Local Development Scheme sets out a 3 year programme for the publication of documents and with an anticipated review regime. A review of the East of England Plan has already commenced which will mean that the Colchester Core Strategy and Site Allocations DPD will be reviewed when the Regional Plan is adopted. The purpose of this report is to enable the Committee to comment on the review of boundaries and other related matters. However whilst there are some things that can be revisited, it is not possible to revisit what is already contained in the Core Strategy. It was confirmed that the housing target figures were minimum numbers handed down to local authorities from the East of England Plan. The Inspector required local authorities to use minimum figures for the whole of the borough.

Committee Comments – Affordable housing in villages

- there appeared to be nothing allocated to the villages except affordable housing, a term usually applied to social housing rather than housing that young people can afford;
- there is a requirement to provide affordable/shared equity housing;
- shared equity seems to work because it creates a living community;
- it was believed that the Council did not have to designate exception sites for affordable housing because they are adjacent to village envelopes, and the site allocation document simply suggests that that is what they could be used for;
- affordable housing had worked well in both Langham and Dedham. There are already twenty-four units built and they have the unique situation where a registered housing landlord has built a doctors surgery on affordable land with three affordable properties attached; all five affordable housing sites are contiguous and the landowners provided the land at agricultural prices;
- conversely the lack of confidence about deliverability was voiced because a willing and co-operative landowner was a prerequisite;
- reference was made to an affordable rural housing development in

Hanningfield where the allocation is undertaken by the village: the priorities for assessment are whether the applicants lived in the village, whether they had a family connection with the village, and whether they were key workers. The cost of the site was a great deal more than that paid for the Dedham site and it was considered that there might be a danger that too much is being attempted on the cheap;

- if development has to be within the village envelope the result will be an intensive urban ribbon development and the Council should look at what else housing can bring.

Officer Response – it was explained that when affordable housing sites are considered there are various criteria such as access to services and affordability which need to be considered. It was also confirmed that affordable housing sites do come forward as exception sites. The definition of affordable housing is set out in the Local Plan and in Local Planning Guidance and is classified as housing for people who cannot afford to rent or buy on the open market which applies equally to rural and urban areas. Within rural areas there is additional provision in terms of working with town and parish councils to help provide affordable housing. It was suggested that the document could be enhanced by including statistics on village housing to demonstrate that the targets have been met and this element will be included in the document before it is published.

Committee Comments – Rural communities

- it should be borne in mind that 72% of the borough is rural;
- a report just been issued about the risk of rural communities failing because they may become places for the well off;
- the lack of housing which is affordable is encouraging rural deprivation. Generally people cannot afford a car to get into town or to go to the local supermarket. Where will children go to school? Villages need housing and more work needs to be done;
- the amount of Section 106 monies available to villages depends on the level of planning applications, and vice versa;
- there is a need to look strategically at housing in villages. Some villages would welcome new housing if it brought new families into the village; living villages are what is needed. Sustainable communities comprise generations which are important in rural areas;
- the essential elements of a village are a school, a shop and a public house;
- there are a couple of villages where there are no places for youngsters to play games;
- it was suggested that three houses in each village would help the housing problem by preventing them from becoming dormitories.

Officer Response – the suggestion of three dwellings per village per year would provide ninety new homes which equates to 1,350 new homes in the countryside over the life of the Plan. This could be achieved without allocating new sites.

Committee Comments – Rural employment

- whilst it is accepted that there should be land zoned for employment use, there were concerns about the businesses they would attract and the level of salaries they would provide;
- it was considered that the allocation of rural employment areas outside village boundaries was a positive move;
- the report states that business start ups are higher and more successful in rural areas;
- local industries are using adapted farm buildings and proving extremely successful, but they are not employing too many people;
- there was a view that the document was little prescriptive and perhaps a closer look at PPS7 is appropriate.

Officer Response – it was explained that policies for rural areas were being developed both locally and nationally. The Government is consulting on a consolidated economic development policy for rural and urban areas which incorporates several national Planning Policy Statements including parts of PPS7 on rural areas. The objective is to move away from use classes per se and it is hoped that with the development policies and national policies it will be possible to have a more flexible approach.

Committee Comments – Village design statements and parish plans

- It is imperative that villages produce useful parish plans and efforts have been directed to achieving this aim. These documents will provide the Council with useful information in relation to affordable housing and will make all the difference to the Core Strategy;
- there was some concern that only twenty-two of the thirty-one parish councils had responded to the consultation document and, if appropriate, it was suggested that the remaining parish councils be given more time in which to comment;
- villages without a plan need assistance to develop one and where no response had been received members were encouraged to actively support the parish councils in the preparation of village design statements.

Officer Response – it is intended that a review of needs from 2021 up to 2031 be undertaken. The comments on village design documents were welcomed. It was confirmed that parish plans and village design statements would not be too late to influence documents in the local development framework which is a

more responsive document. As they come forward they will form part of the evidence base. Those parish councils which have not responded to the consultation have been followed up by email, letter and telephone and the Council is very keen to get their feedback.

Committee Comments – Design and sustainability

- design is more important in rural areas and there are innovative developers and construction coming through;
- the first phase of the Linden Homes development is energy efficient but the design is poor;
- eco friendly homes are affordable in terms of maintenance and running. Perhaps the Council should be looking at best practice and this is a market yet to be examined.

Committee Comments – Tiptree

- locally Tiptree is considered to be a village and therefore has a village envelope not a settlement boundary, the latter term is used in connection with Tiptree in the document;
- the housing allocation should be a maximum and not a minimum, and windfall sites should count towards the target;
- there remained concerns about the Wilkin site being included in the site allocations, because the site is considered to be an industrial zone and not suitable for housing because of the poor infrastructure. Nearly 200 people attended a Tiptree village meeting in opposition to this particular site being allocated for housing and the view that the Council should listen to that level of public feeling was supported;
- local employment areas which can minimise traffic were needed desperately so the employment land should remain where it was and not be allocated for housing. It is the wrong place for housing and the situation needs to be reviewed having regard to access from the A12 and Grange Road. Members were also aware that Station Road had a vacant employment provision. A site visit, possibly to Tiptree, was suggested.

Officer Response – it was confirmed that in the Local Plan Tiptree did not have a village envelope but it did have an easily defined settlement area within which there was an expectation for residential development and outside of which there was a presumption against development. The wish to revisit in part the Tiptree housing allocation was acknowledged. It was explained that a water cycle study was being undertaken and would provide information about the capacity of all sewage treatment works. The Anglian Water plan will be factored into developments. In respect of the employment site in Tiptree, this site was part of a boroughwide review of employment land by independent consultants who have suggested that this site was unlikely to come forward

within the plan period as evidenced by empty units in the locality. Accordingly consideration must be given to reallocating the land (PPS3). There are a number of sites being consulted on at the moment and the comments regarding Tiptree were welcomed.

Committee Comments – on other locations

- the Langham village boundary in figure 9, paragraph 5.9.14, did not look to be correct. It should follow the middle of the old A12 road so the white lozenge should be included;
- the only corridor which has not been looked at is the Colchester to Mersea corridor. There is strong support for a school with a footway into town.

Officer Response – the village boundary of Langham would be clarified. There was support for the corridor from Colchester to West Mersea but it will not come out of this settlement boundary review.

RESOLVED that the comments made by the Committee and all representations be taken into account in formulating the final boundary review document including a review of the policy regarding settlement boundaries/village envelopes in greater depth.

6. Local Wildlife Sites Review

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration on a review of wildlife sites. Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), previously known as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), are areas of land in the borough which have significant wildlife value. Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 places a duty on all public bodies to conserve biodiversity and the outputs from the review will help the Council to meet its obligations under this legislation. Beverley McClean, Coast and Countryside Planner, attended to assist the Committee in its deliberations.

The original report on SINCs was produced in 1991 and was heavily evidenced based using extensive field surveys. In 2006 DEFRA developed new robust selection criteria and in 2008 the Council commissioned a land use and habitat survey using the new selection criteria. From the original list of sites, twenty-two were deleted including any sites with an SSSI designation because they are protected under their own legislation, and any sites which did not meet the new criteria or their nature conservation interest had decreased. Some sites were amalgamated and forty-eight new sites were added.

It was explained that the review document would be on the website very soon. If a site did not fulfil the criteria it may be a case of not being managed well. However, there is now more information about biodiversity and Essex Wildlife Trust has offered to help landowners to improve those sites in private ownership. The Council will manage its own sites and promote good management and protection to other landowners. Members of the Committee made a number of comments including: sites they were aware of but which were not on the list; queries about particular sites to be clarified after the meeting; queries about access and the presence of a site on the list not necessarily conferring rights of access beyond any public rights which already existed.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and the review of Local Wildlife Sites be approved as part of the evidence base to inform the Local Development Framework, in particular the Site Allocations Development Policy Document and the Development Policies Development Policy Document, scheduled for submission in autumn 2009.