

Minutes of the meeting of the **Planning Policy Sub-Committee** held on **Thursday 8 June 2000** when there were present:

Cllr K A Gibbs
Cllr A Hosking
Cllr C C Langlands
Cllr Mrs S J Lemon

Cllr C R Morgan
Cllr R E Vingoe
Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr D A Weir
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T G Cutmore, Mrs J M Giles and R A Pearson.

SUBSTITUTES

Councillors Mrs J Helson, G A Mockford and P F A Webster.

VISITING MEMBERS

Councillors R A Powell and T Livings.

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Scrutton	-	Head of Corporate Policy and Initiatives
G Brazendale	-	Committee Administrator

81 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

Resolved

That Councillor D A Weir be appointed as Chairman of the Sub-Committee.

82 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor A Hosking declared a non-pecuniary interest in the item relating to Chelmsford Borough Council's Local Plan Second Issues Report (Minute 86) by virtue of his Chairmanship of the District Group of the Council for the Protection of Rural Essex.

83 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 April 2000 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

84 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Sub-Committee's terms of reference, as agreed at Annual Council, were noted.

85 DRAFT REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR THE SOUTH EAST (RPG9) – PROPOSED CHANGES

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Corporate Policy and Initiatives which gave details of the Government's proposed revisions to the Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9).

Members were reminded that the initial draft guidance had been prepared and published by the London and South East Regional Planning Conference (SERPLAN) and subsequently examined in public by a Panel chaired by Professor Stephen Crowe. The Panel's findings were published in September 1999 and the Government had subsequently published its conclusions on the Panel's report, the closing date for submissions on which was 19 June 2000. A copy of the report had been placed in the Members' Room.

The Head of Service informed Members that SERPLAN was to consider the Panel's report and the Government's comments on 12 June 2000. A submission received by the Authority from SERPLAN's Policy Group indicated that, for housing provision in the Rest of the South East (ROSE) planning region, the Government's proposed figures would be rejected as too high, the levels contained within SERPLAN's initial guidance being regarded as sufficient to meet demand.

The Sub-Committee examined a number of areas in which there had been key alterations to the original strategy proposed by SERPLAN, as follows:

- **Housing**

It was noted that local authorities were required to make provision for the period 1996 – 2016 at a predetermined rate of 43,000 dwellings per annum. Appended to the report was a table which showed an average annual rate for Essex of 5,420 dwellings per annum which, over a five-year period, would yield 27,100 dwellings. Based on the draft Structure Plan housing distribution, this would equate to a requirement for 1,145 dwellings to be provided in Rochford in the period 2011 –2016. Members considered that such a figure was unrealistic for Rochford and that the guidance should clarify that such a target was an average figure, to be achieved across the whole region, and not within each individual district or even county area.

The RPG did not explain how the higher densities in housing development that would inevitably result from the Government's proposals could be achieved.

- **Thames Gateway**

It was agreed that the Government's acceptance of the justification to extend the Thames Gateway should be welcomed. It was noted that the map included within the Government's document (a copy of which was appended to the report) was imprecise about the exact position of the boundary, but it was considered appropriate for the airport, adjacent industrial area and the Rochford Business Park to be included within the Thames Gateway area.

- **Transport**

There was concern that the integrated proposals for transport included in the original SERPLAN document had been lost. The RPG did not seem to acknowledge the problems of congestion and the impact this had on the economic vitality of the region. It was agreed that transport improvements must be linked with the spatial strategy for the region and that congestion must be eased by considering the role of demand management measures.

Members discussed the key points that should be included within this Council's response to the Draft Guidance which are outlined below:

- The Government's wish for "evidence-led" planning should be supported as the best means of ensuring that local housing needs were met. It was recognised that this approach would require both periodic review and revision of existing sources of information (such as the Housing Needs Survey) and the preparation of new data. The types of evidence needed and the associated resource implications were considered in some detail and are outlined later in these Minutes.
- Concern was expressed that the Government's figures for the future level of house building appeared to be entirely arbitrary and had been determined with neither any reference to the particular circumstances of individual Districts or Boroughs, nor to local consultation. The Sub-Committee concurred with the view of a Member that residents should be informed of the way in which the house building targets had been derived by Central Government, with little input by this Council.
- The Thames Gateway would have a major impact within the District, both positive and negative, possibly leading to increased pressure on housing and the transport infrastructure.

- Whilst economic regeneration was vital for the District, measures should also be taken to ensure the environment was preserved and enhanced.
- Greater consideration should be given to the layout and type of housing; the Housing Needs Survey had indicated very clearly the demand for affordable, three-bedroom units and local planning authorities were now able to exercise greater control over the nature of new development. The Government's expressed preference for higher housing densities was noted, which could potentially be achieved by reducing garden/car parking areas although the latter could, it was pointed out, lead to increased roadside parking.
- An assurance from central government should be sought that, in future, the strategy for housing development would be plan-led, based on local evidence. It was considered that, in the past, planning applications for residential development of a type unsuitable for the District had been upheld upon appeal, often in apparent contradiction of the policies contained within the District Plan. The role of government inspectors in enforcing local Plans was critical.
- Proposals for an outer by-pass should be rejected.

Giving further consideration to the type, and preparation of, suitable evidence from which forecasts of future housing need could be drawn, the Sub-Committee was informed that two further data sources had been identified. One was a comprehensive review of the existing inner Green Belt boundary, which was already underway and the other was an urban capacity analysis to determine whether, and where, more housing could be accommodated. A number of other possible avenues for investigation were suggested, which included an environmental audit; a re-examination of shopping surveys; consultations with local schools concerning their perceptions of demand for school places; and discussions with the primary care group concerning the provision of health facilities. The time-consuming nature of the preparation of such data was recognised and, on a motion by Councillor Mrs M.J. Webster and seconded by Councillor R E Vingoe, it was agreed to recommend that the Member Budget Monitoring Working Group be requested to consider the provision of sufficient resources for this purpose, either internally or by the use of external consultants.

It was concluded that, notwithstanding the District Council's arguably limited influence on the Government's housing and transport policies and their local implications, the Authority's aim should be to develop and publicise its own views upon appropriate future options, following extensive local consultations. It was paramount to involve residents in

any future review of the Local Plan, either by use of “Rochford District Matters” and/or local roadshows.

RECOMMENDED to Transportation and Environmental Services Committee:-

That the Head of Services’ report as considered by the Sub-Committee, together with Members’ comments as outlined above, form the basis of this Council’s comments on the Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9)(HCPI).

It was further

RECOMMENDED to Member Budget Monitoring Working Group:-

That consideration be given to funding sufficient resources to enable a comprehensive review to be undertaken of factors likely to affect the demand for, and provision of, future housing and associated infrastructure. (HCPI)

86 CHELMSFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL – LOCAL PLAN SECOND ISSUES REPORT

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Corporate Policy and Initiatives which outlined proposals for possible locations for future housing development within Chelmsford Borough and, in particular, examined suggested development adjacent to the Rochford boundary at Battlesbridge.

Members were informed that Chelmsford Borough Council had published a second Local Plan Issues Report to build on the basic principles for development outlined in their first issues report. The new report assessed against the Council’s principles a number of green field locations which might be used for future development, and outlined the arguments for the preferred locations for new building at Margaretting, Battlesbridge and South Woodham Ferrers.

In view of its location in relation to the Rochford District, the Sub-Committee considered in more detail the Battlesbridge proposals.

It was recognised that the expansion of Battlesbridge by 2000 or more dwellings would have an impact on the remainder of the settlement on the south side of the river within Rochford District, though the development could have positive benefits. Conversely, new housing and other associated infrastructure such as schools, recreational and leisure facilities would change the nature of the existing village significantly for the residents on both sides of the river. It was suggested that, as a result of the existing limited access for heavy goods vehicles through Battlesbridge itself, the proposed development could increase such traffic through Rawreth.

Clearly, the proposals would have major implications for the use of roads, schools, shops and medical facilities within Rochford and, on a motion by Councillor Mrs J Helson and seconded by Councillor Mrs S J Lemon, it was agreed to recommend that the Council's concerns about the size of the proposed development, and its likely effect upon the District's infrastructure be conveyed to Chelmsford Borough Council.

The Sub-Committee also expressed disappointment that there had, to date, been no formal Officer or Member discussions between the two authorities concerning the proposals, and requested that a letter be sent to the Chief Executive of Chelmsford Borough Council to this effect.

RECOMMENDED

That Chelmsford Borough Council be informed of this Council's concerns about the impact of 2000 houses at Battlesbridge upon the infrastructure in Rochford District. (HCPI)

The Meeting closed at 9.10 pm

Chairman

Date