

## **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 1 March 2006**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **1 March 2006** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr P A Capon  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr J M Pullen

Cllr J E Grey  
Cllr Mrs S A Harper  
Cllr R A Oatham

Cllr Mrs M A Starke  
Cllr P F A Webster

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs H L A Glynn and P K Savill.

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

S Scrutton	- Head of Planning Services
A Meddle	- Team Leader (Local Plans)
M Martin	- Committee Administrator

### **77 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **78 PREPARATION OF THE ROCHFORD CORE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services explaining the background to the preparation of the Rochford Core Strategy and seeking the Committee's initial view on the long-term spatial vision and the strategic policies required to deliver that vision.

The Budget Strategy recently reported to Council had included the key priorities and actions that had been identified at the Budget Awaydays held in November and January. As some of these would have planning implications, they had been appended to the officer's report. Also appended to the report were extracts from a fictional core strategy, which had been prepared by the Planning Officers' Association and an initial assessment of the District's industrial estates in terms of their suitability for housing redevelopment or their imperative for retention as employment areas.

In presenting the report, the Head of Planning Services advised that:-

- The Core Strategy development plan would be the first new planning document that would effectively start to replace the Local Plan under the new planning system. It would need to incorporate a sustainability appraisal and a strategic environment assessment. Tests would then be

applied to the proposals emerging through the planning process to determine how the District would change over a period of time and to ensure that development would not undermine the District's assets or unreasonably impact on long-term sustainability.

- A summary of the Core Strategy process had been included within the report; this summarised the timetable for the preparation of the document, which it was essential the Council adhered to. A number of other key pieces of work would be required to support the preparation of the Core Strategy.
- The issues covered in the Core Strategy would need to reflect the broader spatial perspectives of the new planning system. This would mean that other key Council documents and strategies, such as the Community Strategy, must be linked to the Core Strategy in particular.
- The programme provided for informal public participation to take place in the Autumn of this year, at which stage Members would need to present a number of spatial options for the future development of the District.
- A second, more formal, stage of consultation would take place in Spring 2007, when reference would be made to the outcomes of the earlier consultation and the Council would need to identify its preferred development options.

During discussion of points associated with the development of the Core Strategy, the following observations were made:-

### **Consultation**

During public consultation it should be made clear that, in responding to the requirements of Central Government, the District Council would be looking for the best way forward for the District. The consultation could indicate those parts of the District that were unlikely to be considered for development for specific reasons, such as environmental designations or flood risk areas. Other matters that might be part of the option assessment could be put forward, such as the size range for development sites, the use of brownfield sites or reallocation of non-residential uses.

It was a requirement of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that open, fair and transparent consultation takes place. However, Members were free to consider how this might best be achieved within the framework being set by the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). Following the option appraisal stage of consultation, the Council would need to consider its preferred options.

### **Identifying Sites**

Once proceedings had reached the site specific stage, Members would have a significant level of control over how future development areas were constructed. For example, it would be possible to determine the mix of dwelling types, their tenure, elements of layout and design, density and so on.

It was important to bear in mind that a range of delivery mechanisms would need to be employed to deliver spatial planning strategies and objectives over the next 15/20 years, whereas traditional land-use policies had been delivered primarily through development control.

In terms of spatial development options that might be considered, housing allocation could, for example, be provided in existing urban areas or all in one location as a new settlement. Alternatively the focus could be on specific areas/existing settlements. Whilst the Government's housing density advice indicated that between 60 and 100 hectares of land might be required for development over the next 15/20 years, the challenge of accommodating this level of development needed to be viewed in proportion to the District as a whole.

Any new site proposed would have to add to the sustainability of the area. The Core Strategy was about the delivery of overarching policy objectives that would guide the formation and character of District over next 15/20 years.

### **Infrastructure**

Members expressed concern around the infrastructure required to sustain further development. Of specific concern was the provision of adequate schools, road networks and doctors/dentist provision. One of the key issues for the authority was the need to lever out as much value from any new development, including contributions where necessary to road improvements; the County Council would need to be involved in these decisions.

However, a consideration could be to look at the population required in an area to validate the need for a school, where there was currently a lack of provision. Development over recent years would need to be included in the considerations, to ensure that certain areas were not over burdened with new development. A Member referred specifically to the intensity of recent development within the Western Rayleigh area.

### **Flooding**

This was not likely to be a relevant consideration, as any proposed development was more likely to be within the core of the District, which was not prone to tidal flooding.

### **Affordable Housing**

The Regional Spatial Strategy required a minimum of 30% of the total housing supply to be affordable. Members noted that, whilst economies of scale were important, it was essential that in allocating sites for development, the mix of dwelling types and tenures be identified. Developers would be provided with many supporting documents, which would explain how the local planning authority expected a site to be developed, for example, in terms of energy conservation.

Members expressed concern that already there were examples within the District of smaller starter homes having been bought on a 'buy to rent' basis, which frequently resulted in them failing to remain 'affordable' after the first sale. In order for 'affordable housing' to remain in perpetuity, it needed to be delivered through housing associations with a part or full subsidy.

Low cost market housing was no longer considered as 'affordable'. The PPS3 threshold for affordable housing on new sites was a minimum of 15 units.

### **Technical issues**

Further into the process technical issues, such as highways standards, would need to be addressed. The County Council would be able to provide specialists to avoid the need for appointing external consultants.

### **Industrial Estates**

A PPS3 requirement was to look at whether industrial estates were situated in the best locations and whether there was merit in considering alternative development, particularly housing. A recently completed Thames Gateway survey had indicated that many industrial estates were looking 'tired'. Taking account of the sustainability analysis, Members would need to consider any justification for alternative uses on existing non-residential sites.

### **Preservation of the Retail Element**

The only way to effectively protect the retail element in local neighbourhoods was to ensure that people supported their local shopping parades. However, it was recognised that trends in shopping had changed dramatically over recent years and influences such as this would affect the vision of the District in 15/20 years.

### **Identify of Settlements**

Members may determine that it is a high priority that the village atmosphere be retained within the District, by seeking to prevent the sprawl of development.

### **Creation of Jobs**

A mix of managerial and technical jobs was needed. Whilst it was desirable to reduce out-commuting wherever possible, it had to be recognised that because of the relative ease of commuting into London from this District, it would remain a challenge. Local job creation was taking place, for example, the University in Southend, local companies such as IPECO who had recently offered 40 apprenticeships and the local hospital. These would all involve training personnel in high quality transferable skills. The Thames Gateway strategy was to be job and infrastructure led, which could be seen as the direction for this District.

### **Provision for Health Facilities**

The Primary Care Trust had identified there was a requirement for a 2 hectare site in Rayleigh to accommodate new health facilities. This matter should be addressed through the preparation of the Core Strategy and the subsequent Site Allocation development Plan Document.

### **Broad Concepts**

Members agreed that it would be helpful if they had further time to consider the issues discussed including the likely timing with regard to identifying sites and detail around the informal consultation stage. To assist this, officers supplied each Member of the Committee with a map of the District, so that they could begin to consider spatial options and ideas, including identifying areas of the District that might not be considered appropriate for future development.

A further meeting would be arranged to continue the discussions. Officers would also supply Members with a map detailing the provision of schools, and doctors' and dentists' surgeries across the District and whether or not they were full.

A copy of the recent housing needs study would also be circulated to Members.

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....

