

Minutes of the meeting of the **Planning Policy Sub-Committee** held on **4 January 2001** when there were present:

Cllr D A Weir (Chairman)
Cllr T G Cutmore
Cllr K A Gibbs
Cllr Mrs J M Giles
Cllr A Hosking
Cllr C C Langlands

Cllr Mrs S J Lemon
Cllr R A Pearson
Cllr R E Vingoe
Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr C R Morgan

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Scrutton	Head of Planning Services
Mrs M A Martin	Committee Administrator

100 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 November 2000 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

101 OUR COUNTRYSIDE - THE FUTURE

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which provided Members with a first introduction to the contents of the rural white paper published by the Government in November 2000. This had coincided with the publication of a parallel white paper on urban renaissance. The key elements of the white paper had been summarised as an Appendix to the report.

The white paper dealt in great detail with the future well being of the countryside and included a number of cross cutting measures intended to 'make a difference' for those living and working in, and those using, the countryside. The key aim would be to sustain and enhance the distinctive environment, economy and social fabric of the English countryside for the benefit of all.

Members were informed that significant elements of the document would inform the process of the preparation of the next Local Plan. However the breadth of the proposals and their implications would go beyond land-use planning policies and these would need to be taken into account as the District Council develops various strategies, eg crime and disorder, bus services, etc.

It would be necessary to bid for available grants, such as for enhancement of market towns. The Rochford and Rayleigh Town Centre Working Groups should be well placed to take advantage of this.

During debate, the following concerns/comments were noted :-

- indices of deprivation would feed into crime and disorder strategy.
- funding for rural policing available and yet closures of police stations still discussed.
- talk of conserving countryside did not equate with required provision of affordable homes which had doubled in number; it is assumed that grants to Housing Association would be increased.
- local transport - Essex County Council are reviewing the way they allocate funding for social bus services.
- market town regeneration in or near Rural Priority Areas; Rochford should qualify.
- conservation of wildlife; there appeared to be no recognition that much of the countryside is under threat.
- many of the suggestions appeared admirable, but would they be achievable?
- farmers needed to be able to take full advantage of what is made available
- areas such as Fambridge need support in terms of provision of a shop, postbus etc.
- support for village shops seemed to be a contradiction of current trend.
- need to ensure that flexibility exists in all areas of planning.

In response to Member questions, the Head of Planning Services confirmed that:-

- this report, together with the subsequent one on urban issues would be reported in to the Partnership Sub-Committee of 17 January 2001.
- where necessary, extra meetings of this Sub-Committee would be arranged to debate issues.
- a Guidebook relating to the Local Plan process produced by the Department of Transport and the Regions would be circulated to Members.

Recommended

That the summary of the white paper 'Our Countryside: the future' be noted and that further reports be brought to appropriate Committees as the individual elements of the proposals outlined in the document are developed by the Government. (HPS)

102 OUR TOWNS AND CITIES: THE FUTURE

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which provided Members with a first introduction to the contents of the urban white paper published by the Government in November 2000. A summary of the white paper had been appended to this report.

The launch of this white paper had coincided with the launch of the parallel white paper on rural issues. This white paper was the first document in more than twenty years that attempted to pull together government policies and strategies for urban areas. The Government's vision was for towns, cities and suburbs which would offer a high quality of life and opportunity for all.

During debate, the following concerns/comments were noted:-

- many of the ideas were excellent, but were they achievable?
- Rayleigh would be the only town in the District to benefit from this white paper.
- flexibility needed to exist in all areas of planning.

Recommended

That the summary of the white paper 'Our Towns and Cities: the future' be noted and that further reports be brought to appropriate committees as the individual elements of the proposals outlined in the document are developed by the Government. (HPS)

103 ROCHFORD DISTRICT REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN INNER GREEN BELT BOUNDARY STUDY

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which updated Members on the inner green belt boundary project and sought Members' approval for a set of criteria to be used to assign a value to each distinct area of green belt abutting a built up area. The chosen criteria would be used to carry out a site assessment process which, depending on the outcome of the Urban Capacity Study, could then be used in the selection of potential housing sites.

The interim final report on the Urban Capacity Study was due shortly from the Consultants. The awaited DETR guidance had now been received and it would be possible for the consultants to build this in to the report.

A complete list of the suggested criteria was appended to the report. The Head of Planning Services reminded Members that many of these related to issues regularly raised as planning queries, such as blocks of land immediately adjacent to the green belt boundaries. This would be with a view to identifying sites to be fed in to the Local Plan. To date, it is not known how many houses the District might be required to provide beyond the green belt boundary. The process would need to look as far ahead as 2016.

Local Authorities will be tested on their site allocations and a robust methodology would be required against which to test sites. It would no longer be possible to allow allocations solely on the basis of causing the least disturbance. Land that is identified as not fulfilling the green belt function may have to be identified as development or for longer term provision as restraint land. It was noted that the outer green belt boundary should follow

recognisable features, whereas this is not an appropriate arrangement for the inner boundary.

Members noted the importance of agreeing a weighted scoring system for each of the identified criteria. This would provide a robust and rational system for identifying areas for future development. Sites considered for allocation should be subject to a design brief process in order to identify all issues for consideration by Members.

Recommended

- (1) That the criteria laid out in the Appendix to the Report be approved for use as a site selection tool to establish a shortlist of sites for possible release from the Green Belt.
- (2) That an exempt report be brought back to the Sub-Committee once the appraisal process has been completed, to assess amendments to the Green Belt boundary and the implications of the assessment process.
(HPS)

The meeting closed at 9.45 pm.

Chairman

Date