

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 28 March 2006

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **28 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 P K Savill

VISITING

Councillor C I Black

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs H L A Glynn, Mrs M A Starke and P F A Webster.

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Scrutton	- Head of Planning Services
A Meddle	- Team Leader (Local Plans)
J Bostock	- Principal Committee Administrator

107 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 March 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

108 ROCHFORD CORE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services that provided further information on the early stages in the preparation of the Rochford Core Strategy, including initial ideas on the spatial portrait of the District and broad development options.

In presenting the report, the Head of Planning Services advised that the detail on doctor/dental surgeries and schools in the District, as set out at Appendix 3, could be added to the evidence base.

Responding to questions, the Head of Planning Services advised that:-

- Allowing for the number of new dwellings within the District since 2001, about 3,000 further dwellings would need to be provided to meet the housing allocation in the East of England Plan in the period to 2021.

- Whilst it may be possible to consider an option such as locating all development in a new settlement, it is important to ensure that residents are provided with an opportunity to give their views on all possible options. Consultation on the core strategy would need to cover a broad range of consultees, including the Environment Agency and the Fire Authority.
- At the stage when the Authority is considering site identification, it will be a prerequisite that any associated land can be brought on-stream in good time to accord with the requirements of a five year rolling programme (which will be monitored annually).
- It would not be appropriate for the Authority to consider developing proposals for areas that are likely to be subject to flooding. Any surface/foul water issues would have to be fully considered.
- The Core strategy policies must be linked with the Council's Community Strategy. The Community Strategy would provide a link to infrastructure issues such as doctor/dental surgeries and school provision and provision for the elderly.
- It is important to remain mindful of the need to deliver new employment land, given the allocation for 3,000 jobs included in the East of England Plan.
- Whilst the report identified that one option could be urban extension to the existing settlements of Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley, there is no reason why the Authority could not consider the expansion of smaller settlements with a view to developing their sustainability. There would need to be associated strategic/environmental assessments. The importance of the retention of community identity for settlements could be incorporated within the Council's vision.
- A high number of new dwellings would have to be introduced to point to a need for a new secondary school. In that there are schools within the District working to capacity, any options would need to be discussed with the Local Education Authority.
- This stage of the process is not about site specifics.
- The Government is seeking to achieve good design and sustainable housing provision within Local Development Frameworks.
- There is scope to consider the possibilities for encouraging business starter units and the provision of additional sports pitch facilities in the context of an increasing population. There are

various standards associated with sports pitches and there would be a need to update the Council's pitch strategy.

- The Core Strategy will be informed by the East of England Plan and other Government legislation/guidance. A key principle built into the East of England Plan is achieving a balance between the number of residents and the number of jobs available locally. Whilst it is essential to consider job/infrastructure issues in advance of housing, it is not fully clear how such an approach would ally with Government housing requirements. Local Authorities have been lobbying the Government about the need for sophisticated analysis and monitoring of changes in the job market.
- In terms of resources, whilst there has been a suggestion that the planning delivery grant will continue, this is not clear at the moment. It is understood the Government is currently reviewing the situation and also considering the role and appropriate level of planning fees.
- Water availability is pertinent. In working on the sub-regional part of the East of England Plan, South Essex Local Authorities questioned water companies about their resources for homes and industry. Assurances were given that water resources should not be a major issue in South Essex. That said, the fact that high levels of water are pumped from the north points to a likelihood that there will be further questions around sustainability.
- A Parish forum/summit would be the appropriate mechanism for consultation with the Town/Parish Councils. Early initial consultation could be followed by further consultation through the Autumn allied to extensive consultation with all other interested parties, including residents.
- The Government continues to make adjustments to building regulations aimed at further improving the energy efficiency of new homes. The planning process has a role to play in the area of energy efficiency and these issues will need to be considered in the preparation of the Core Strategy.

During discussion, specific reference was made to the importance of both full public consultation and early consultation with the Town/Parish Councils. In terms of infrastructure, reference was made to the value of being mindful that insufficient road width can be an issue. Industrial facilities should be allied to appropriate road networks.

It was observed that adjustments to school bus routes could have implications for both public expenditure and child health. It was also

observed that consideration should perhaps be given to the development of a uniform standard for the introduction of sports pitches and to the need for strategic thinking to encompass both indoor and outdoor sports facilities. Preparation of the Development Plan was clearly resource intensive. Account would need to be taken of sewage capacity.

It was recognised that any broad development options should form part of a full community consultation exercise. At this stage such options are purely mooted for consultation purposes.

Resolved

- (1) That the broad development options, as set out in the report, be part of the informal community consultation process.
- (2) That the proposal for a Parish Forum or Summit to discuss the Core Strategy be agreed, subject to this being in place as early as possible in the new Municipal Year. (HPS)

The meeting closed at 8.29pm

Chairman

Date