

Minutes of the meeting of the **Planning Policy Sub-Committee** held on Thursday 2 November when there were present:

Cllr D A Weir (Chairman)

Cllr T G Cutmore
Cllr Mrs J M Giles
Cllr C C Langlands
Cllr C R Morgan

Cllr R A Pearson
Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr Mrs M A Weir

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs S J Lemon and R E Vingoe

SUBSTITUTES

Councillors R S Allen and Mrs H L A Glynn

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Scrutton Head of Planning Services

G Brazendale Committee Administrator

95 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Mrs H L A Glynn declared a non-pecuniary interest in the report concerning Rochford Hospital – Redevelopment Proposals (Minute 99) by virtue of her association with Rochford Hospital and Rochford County Primary School.

96 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 October 2000 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Mrs M J Webster as being present at the Meeting.

97 PLANNING APPLICATIONS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which outlined the arrangements for processing planning applications relating to sites where there is a need for an archaeological investigation. The possible need for amendments to the policies in the District Local Plan was also examined.

Members were informed of the key principles and possible courses of action that Local Planning Authorities can take when considering the archaeological implications of planning applications, as set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note No 16 – Archaeology and Planning (PPG16).

The Rochford District Local Plan includes several policies that seek to provide a local framework for the PPG16 guidance. The relevant policies were appended to the report. During discussion, concerning the policies the following main points arose:

- In order to provide clear guidance on the protection of archaeological evidence, Members considered that the wording of Policies U12,13 and 14 should be strengthened, in particular removing ambiguous terms such as “will be expected” and “normally”. The Head of Service confirmed that such wording was no longer seen as acceptable in policy drafting, and that he would discuss the necessary alterations in forthcoming consultations with the County Archaeologist.
- Some concern was expressed about the concept of a “watching brief”, and the need for these to be time limited to prevent unacceptable delays in the progress of building projects. It was acknowledged, however, that this was a technical term which would need to be retained in policy formulation, and that the timescale would be determined by the evidence found.

Responding to Member questions, the Head of Service advised that:

- The County Archaeologist maintains a register of all archaeologically significant sites across the County/District, which is used in assessing the impact of planning applications.
- Essex County Council would provide a watching brief over small scale excavations where only limited archaeological evidence was anticipated; developers would be expected to cover the costs on larger sites.

The Head of Service confirmed that the County Archaeologist’s views on Members’ requested alterations to the District’s Local Plan policies would be sought, with a further report to this Sub-Committee when those views had been obtained.

RECOMMENDED

That no alteration be suggested to the current Rochford District Local Plan Policies UC12-15 at this stage as part of the overall Local Plan review process, but that the County Archaeologist’s views be requested on the amendments requested by Members, with this

information being reported to a future meeting of the Sub-Committee. (HPS)

98 SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which gave details of a consultation received from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), which provided a new code of guidance concerning the management and protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The main points of the guidance were summarised in an appendix to the report. Comments on the consultation paper were required by 16 November 2000.

Members noted that there were three areas within Rochford District designated as SSSIs: Hockley Woods, Maplin Sands and the River Crouch Marshes. In response to Member questions, the Head of Service advised that the SSSI boundaries at these locations had been re-drawn more tightly some five years ago. As a result, much of Foulness and Potton Islands were excluded. It was unlikely that any further revision to enlarge the designated areas would be considered by the DETR.

During discussion concerning the SSSIs within the District, reference was made to the role of the Crouch Harbour Authority in managing the extensive coastline at around the Eastern end of the district. . On a motion by Councillor Mrs H L A Glynn and seconded by Councillor T G Cutmore, it was agreed that consideration should be given to seeking to enlarge the area eligible for environmental protection under European legislation to correspond more closely with that of the Crouch Harbour Authority. The Head of Service informed Members that there was a whole range of designations designed to protect the environment, of which the SSSI was but one. A new European designation would cover the majority of the Rochford coastline and this, together with the other designations, would be included within the next District Local Plan. At present significant parts of the coastline had been identified as Special Areas for Conservation (SACs). These would in due course be confirmed as European Areas of interest, though the timescale for formal designation was unclear.

Following consideration of the guidance, the Sub-Committee agreed that the introduction of common standards for the identification of sites was to be welcomed. It was essential that all sites that have value should be included, but the criteria should apply across the board and be easily understood. The introduction of a clear statement of management requirements would serve to address concerns about the management and protection of SSSIs and the damage that could be

caused by inadequate protection. Proceedings for offences in relation to SSSIs would continue to be the sole responsibility of English Nature.

The proposed procedures intended to control activities on designated sites were also welcomed. It was hoped that the proposed management notices would be actively used as a mechanism to control inappropriate activities in cases where active management agreements could be reached. Public bodies would be expected to adopt the highest standards in relation to SSSIs which they own in order to secure positive management in accordance with an agreed management scheme. In Rochford's case, this would apply to the management of Hockley Woods.

The policy (RC3) included in the Local Plan would need to be amended in light of the new code of guidance. The dissemination of information by English Nature was welcomed, and the extent of SSSIs within Rochford District would be shown on the Local Plan Proposal Map. It was concluded that the proposed code of guidance would make a positive contribution to the management and protection of SSSIs.

RECOMMENDED

That the Head of Service's report as considered by the Sub-Committee, together with Members' comments as outlined above, form the basis of this Council's comments on the DETR's consultation paper "Sites of Special Scientific Interest: Encouraging Positive Partnerships". (HPS)

99 ROCHFORD HOSPITAL – REDEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

The Sub Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services, which explained the outline proposals being prepared by the South Essex Mental Health and Community Care Trust for the redevelopment of the Rochford Hospital site.

The Sub-Committee was reminded that, on 26 April 2000, Members had received a presentation from the Chief Executive of the Trust and had resolved to support in principle the developing strategic plan. The Trust had written to the Council on 3 October 2000 asking for support for the proposals, in order to allow an outline business case to be sent to the NHS Executive and South Essex Health Authority by 20 October 2000. A general letter of support, in the light of the April decision, had been provided by Officers but no advice on the acceptability of the proposed demolition of the district office was given.

The Sub-Committee examined appended plans (DCP1 and DCP2) showing two options for the site's redevelopment, the fundamental

difference between them being, respectively, the retention or demolition of the District Office building.

Members were informed that Mr Nigel Leonard, Project Director for the Trust, was present in the public gallery. On a motion by Councillor C R Morgan, seconded by Councillor D A Weir and agreed unanimously, Mr Leonard was invited to provide the Sub-Committee with further information relating to the Trust's proposals, and to answer Members' questions.

Mr Leonard explained that the District Offices were presently used only for office accommodation, and that the Trust favoured the option shown on plan DCP2, involving this building's demolition, thereby allowing rationalisation of car parking facilities. Within this option, the single car park would provide 150 spaces. Gowing House would be retained for use as a kitchen and staff café, its conversion taking account of, and being sympathetic towards, the building's current appearance and structure. The current dining area, would be remodelled to provide accommodation for patients with mental and physical health problems. There would be no forensic, secure, or semi-secure units on the site, since these would be retained at Runwell Hospital. Mr Leonard concluded by explaining that the Council's support in principle for the proposals would show that the scheme was viable. Such support would not be prejudicial to subsequent consideration of the scheme by the Planning Services Committee.

It was noted that the Trust's negotiations concerning purchase of part of the Primary School site were still continuing.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Sub-Committee, thanked Mr Leonard for his attendance and helpful explanation.

It was concluded that, overall, the proposed changes to existing buildings within the Hospital site were relatively modest and, subject to the planning process, general support could be provided, with further consideration being given to the provision of additional car parking.

RECOMMENDED

That the South Essex Mental Health and Community Care Trust be informed that Rochford Council supports, in principle, the redevelopment proposals for Rochford Hospital, subject to their consideration by the Local Planning Authority in due course, and further consideration being given to the provision of the proposed additional car parking. (HPS)

The meeting closed at 8.55pm

Chairman.....

Date.....