

West Area Committee – 25 November 2008

Minutes of the meeting of the **West Area Committee** held on **25 November 2008** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr J M Pullen

Cllr Mrs P Aves	Cllr Mrs J A Mockford
Cllr C I Black	Cllr R A Oatham
Cllr J E Grey	Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr A J Humphries	Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr D Merrick	

ALSO PRESENT

Cllr K H Hudson	- Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation
Cllr A Matthews	- Rawreth Parish Council
Cllr D Sperring	- Rayleigh Town Council

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Fowler	- Head of Information and Customer Services
S Scrutton	- Head of Planning and Transportation
S Hollingworth	- Team Leader (Planning Policy)
J Owens-Hughes	- Assistant Planner
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

333 AREA COMMITTEE – INITIAL BUSINESS

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs J Dillnutt, T Livings, C J Lumley, Mrs J R Lumley, S P Smith and Mrs C Roe (Rayleigh Town Council).

Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

At this point the Committee adjourned the formal meeting to move into the community forum to hear contributions from members of the public.

334 COMMUNITY FORUM

One question was raised during the Community Forum and a document summarising this and the response given is appended.

335 SPOTLIGHT ISSUES

Cllr Keith Hudson, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation, gave a presentation on the Rochford Core Strategy. He explained that the aim of the

Core Strategy was to provide more housing, jobs, leisure opportunities and better health facilities while creating a vibrant, inclusive, safe, sustainable and modern environment, and retaining Rochford's essential characteristics, including the salt marshes, rivers, woodland, open countryside, villages and market towns. In order to complement the listed building and conservation area legislation and retain and support the District's heritage it was proposed that the 'Local List' be reinstated.

The focus of the Core Strategy was also on developing higher levels of employment and realising the full potential of London Southend Airport in terms of economic growth.

The Core Strategy Preferred Options document detailed the legal requirement for the provision of new housing within the District. The East of England Plan originally required Rochford District to build 4600 new homes between 2001 and 2021; the requirement now is that the plan be extended to 2025, which leaves 4790 homes still to build, equating to approximately 250 new homes every year in Rochford District. The Rochford Urban Capacity Study shows that 1301 new homes can be built without encroaching on the Green Belt, leaving 3489 to locate by 2025. Both Rochford District Council's independent housing needs study of 2004 and the recent Thames Gateway South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment's Final Report, September 2008 agree that the District will have a future requirement for this level of additional housing.

The need for new additional housing was driven primarily by two factors: an ageing population (which reduces the availability of the existing stock of homes) and the need for further homes due to the breakup of families.

In order to comply with legal requirements and to meet the housing need of the District the Council will release Green Belt land very sparingly after having allocated all 'brown field' sites. The burden of release of Green Belt land will be shared by the District as a whole and not concentrated in any one particular area. There will be opposition to the building of houses in back gardens and the intensification of housing densities within existing neighbourhoods, including the proliferation of blocks of flats in roads of single family homes.

The proposed locations of the new housing that is currently recommended to be built between 2015 and 2021 can be found in the Core Strategy document; 35% of the proposed new housing will be affordable housing. A 'site allocations' document will be produced following the expiration of the consultation period of the Core Strategy.

It was appreciated that the provision of new homes and new businesses would necessitate consideration of the effect on existing infrastructure and proposals for infrastructure improvements. It was imperative that the new homes be built in a way that protects the environment and provides the infrastructure to support local communities.

The Council is seeking the views of its residents, partners, stakeholders and businesses on the proposals in the Core Strategy, including their preferred options for the allocation of housing. These views should be submitted to the Planning Department at Rochford District Council via the online consultation system. It was emphasised that every individual communication that the Council receives will be carefully considered. This information would form part of the Council's evidence base. A site allocations development plan document would then be produced and infrastructure plans determined.

Cllr A Matthews expressed the view that any development within Rawreth should be on appropriate sites. He emphasised that the land identified in Rawreth for the development of 650 houses was land of the highest agricultural grade and that it would be preferable to look at alternative brown field sites adjoining existing housing in Rawreth that could yield approximately 200 new houses, with smaller sites off Rawreth Lane that could provide further new housing. All of these were outside the flood plain and could provide the opportunity for further facilities for residents, and were also closer to Battlesbridge Station than Rayleigh Station. He concluded by emphasising that unless there was to be a substantial contribution from the Government towards infrastructure, new housing should not be built. Rawreth did not have the infrastructure to cope with any more development; existing roads, including Rawreth Lane, the A13, A127, London Road and Watery Lane/Beeches Road, and schools and doctors' surgeries were already strained.

In response, officers urged Rawreth Parish Council to formally submit its views to the Core Strategy public consultation. The District Council would welcome all alternative proposals, which would all be carefully considered as part of the process. The District Council was legally required, by the East of England Plan, to build a prescribed number of new houses into the foreseeable future. It was, however, stressed that the agricultural land referred to on the west side of Rayleigh, north of London Road, was grade 3, rather than grade 1, agricultural land.

During debate the following issues were raised:-

- There was no mention of Rawreth in the Core Strategy, which appeared somewhat deceptive. Rawreth was already over-developed and traffic was often at a standstill in Rawreth Lane and Crown Hill. Larger houses built on the former Park School site were too expensive for many local residents to buy. How could the District Council guarantee that residents' children would be able to live in any of the proposed new housing?

In response it was emphasised that there could not be any guarantee that local residents' children would be able to live in the proposed new housing, although at least 35% of any new housing would be affordable housing. It was further indicated that Policy H5 of the Core Strategy dealt specifically with the preferred option for dwelling types, and this specifically recognised a requirement for a proportion of 3-bedroom houses to be

provided. Section H, appendix 1 on pages 38 and 39 of the Core Strategy document includes a table identifying the infrastructure required for each of the general locations, and lists the names of the individual parishes within which these locations are situated.

- In response to a question relating to a possible Southend by-pass, officers confirmed that Policy T1 of the Core Strategy clearly spells out that there will be a need for improvements to the transport infrastructure; it was, however, very unlikely that a relief road would be built.
- In response to concern about any new future housing putting more pressure on already congested roads, and notably Rawreth Lane and London Road, which were often at a complete standstill, the Portfolio Holder remarked that the A1245 would need to be improved in future in order to accommodate traffic generated by additional housing.
- How large will be the proposed industrial estate off London Road; will it be larger than that in Rawreth Lane? What guarantee is there that the area of open space on the other side of London Road that it is proposed to convert to a buffer of parkland to protect the Green Belt will not become development land in the future?

Officers advised that the purpose of the Core Strategy was not to allocate specific sites for development, rather to identify general locations. If a new industrial estate was identified as part of the Core Strategy process, it could well be a replacement for Rawreth industrial estate, which would be better located on a main road, rather than on Rawreth Lane; residents' views on this would be very much welcomed. This would be dealt with in detail in the sites allocation document in due course. The District Council had, for some years now, deployed a policy of linking public open spaces to housing developments to ensure the land beyond is protected.

- In response to a point being raised that the proposal to site 650 new houses between Rawreth Lane and London Road appeared to be concentrating a lot of new development within one area and furthermore would eradicate a natural, green buffer between Rawreth and Wickford, which could not be brought back, officers stressed that the Core Strategy took a balanced approach to the distribution of new housing at locations throughout the District, with some comprising more than 650 houses, as detailed in Policies H2 and H3 of the Core Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation further advised that the Local Development Framework Sub-Committee, in developing its general location proposals, had only looked at locations in the context of geography, demographics and practicalities. The general locations listed in the Core Strategy were the Council's preferred options of where it seemed most sensible to build the new housing, but Members were looking to residents to give their views on any alternatives, as part of this

public consultation process.

- The point was made that in the past 40 years or so only 5 roads had actually been built in the area, including the A1245, A130, Websters Way, Bradley Way and Cherry Orchard Way. Officers, in responding to a question as to why funds were not being spent on developing new roads, advised that the East of England Plan makes explicit reference to investment in local road networks, namely tackling congestion, improving public transport and improving access to local facilities.

It was further emphasised that table H on pages 38 and 39 of the Core Strategy document sets out the broad infrastructure required for each of the general locations, including the requirements for improving transport infrastructure. Funding for local improvements currently came from the developers via Section 106 agreements. The Government was seeking in future to introduce a community infrastructure levy, which in effect would be a tax on every new dwelling constructed to put towards infrastructure costs.

- Responding to a question relating to how the District Council might apply pressure on the County Council to make roads a priority in the District, officers confirmed that the County Council was obliged to take account of the District Council's Core Strategy aspirations, and was, accordingly, one of the partner consultees.
- It was observed that it would be difficult to achieve the number of proposed new dwellings by 2015. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation concurred with this view, but made reference to the legal requirement for the District Council to allocate sufficient land for housing in 5-year tranches; once that land was identified, all the Council could do was to encourage builders to develop the land. In response to a further question relating to how developers would be identified, officers advised that the Core Strategy was looking 15 years ahead; the environment would inevitably change in the future, with developers coming forward with proposals, as the plan reached adoption in 2010.
- In response to a question relating to how many possible sites Members of the Local Development Framework Sub-Committee had visited, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation confirmed that he had gone all around the District looking at different locations; other Sub-Committee Members had visited around 10 locations. He stressed that there were many parts of the District that could not be built on, including areas within the flood plain, ancient woodlands, sites of special scientific interest, and local wildlife sites. The Sub-Committee would look in detail at the results of this public consultation and residents were thus urged to respond with any ideas they might have of alternative locations. There were developers already putting forward large-scale proposals for new housing within the District; it was essential that the Council, in consultation with its residents, determined where any new development should be

placed, rather than run the risk of having the choice made centrally by Government.

- Concern was expressed that any views put forward by residents in response to the consultation that were not planning related would not be taken into account by the Council. Officers advised that this was not the case and that all views would be included in the evidence base.
- Reference was made to pages 38 and 39 on proposed infrastructure for the various locations; it was observed that residents in Rayleigh would not wish to travel to Rawreth in order to attend a primary care centre, particularly given the inadequate bus service. It was further claimed that, with respect to primary school provision, there was the capacity to expand the new Rawreth school; the Essex School Organisation Plan was, however, predicting a surplus of 340 school places in Rayleigh by 2012. It was also observed that the housing proposed for the Rawreth area would not help community cohesion; residents in that location would feel neither part of Rayleigh nor of Rawreth.

Officers agreed that these were all important issues; the Core Strategy document included sections dealing with these, including sections on health care and education. The Primary Care Trust and County Council were, in addition, both consultees.

- It was observed that the North of London Road location appeared to rule out any other sites in Rayleigh. Officers advised that an Urban Capacity Study had been conducted which had identified brown field sites where approximately 1,300 dwellings might be built. The Council would, however, be interested to hear of any additional brown field sites that might be suggested by residents.
- In response to a Member observation that doctors' surgeries should be retained in Rayleigh, with a new primary care centre built allowing residents to have outpatient treatment, such as physiotherapy and routine blood tests rather than having to travel to hospital, officers stressed that this was an issue that should be raised directly with the PCT outside the Core Strategy process; the PCT had specified their requirements in consultation and these are included in the Core Strategy.
- Responding to a question raised by a resident as to what assurances the Council could give to residents that their views would be acknowledged and taken into account when responding to the public consultation, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that residents would see their responses to the consultation appear on the Council's website. Officers further advised that an officer team would be examining all responses, which would be included in a report to the Local Development Framework Sub-Committee, once the consultation had concluded.

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- Concern was expressed about the capacity of Rawreth Lane to cope with large scale development. Officers advised that Policy T1 in the Core Strategy drew attention to the need to secure appropriate funding for highway improvements.
- In response to a concern raised that not enough people were aware of the implications of the Core Strategy and that, even if they were, the details of locations for new housing and proposed infrastructure were too sketchy to be able to come to an informed view, officers advised that a special edition of *Rochford District Matters* on the Core Strategy had been delivered to every household within the Rochford District, which clearly outlined the public consultation process. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation agreed that it would be preferable to show site details within the Core Strategy, but stressed that the process was being driven by the Government.

At this point the Committee re-convened into formal session.

336 WEST AREA UPDATE

Items were carried forward to the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm.

Chairman

Date

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Question

Response

J Wilkinson, Eastwood

Has any further consideration been given by the Council regarding bridle way access to the west of the proposed country park where it joins the New England Woods?

An update will be provided at the next meeting.