

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-008-2017/18

Date of meeting: 11 July 2017



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Planning & Governance

Subject: Epping Forest District Draft Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation

Responsible Officer: Alison Blom-Cooper (01992 564066).

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That the findings of the Draft Local Plan Consultation be noted;
- (2) That the update in relation to progress in the production of the Local Plan be noted.

Executive Summary:

This report provides the findings of the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan Consultation that took place between the 31 October 2016 and 12 December 2016. This follows the earlier report to Cabinet on 9 March 2017 that provided the interim findings of the consultation analysis, together with the updated Local Development Scheme. The Council received a large number of representations from a wide range of stakeholders to the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan Consultation, and detailed analysis of the comments received has now been completed. The Council received 3,387 responses from 3,072 respondents. A summary of the key issues raised, together with the Council's response to these issues, is provided as Appendix A. An Executive Summary of the Consultation Report is provided as Appendix B. The Consultation Report provides both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the feedback received to the consultation.

The report also provides an update in relation to progress being made in the production and finalisation of the Local Plan. The Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Local Plan is due to be published in early 2018, at which stage the Council will invite comments in relation to the 'soundness' and 'legal compliance' of the Plan. The Local Plan will then be submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination-in-Public.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To provide Members with feedback from the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan consultation and provide an update in plan preparation.

Other Options for Action:

Not to advise members of the key issues from the recent Draft Local Plan consultation.

Report:

1. In accordance with the agreed Local Development Scheme, the Cabinet considered the Draft Local Plan on 6 October 2016 and subsequently Full Council agreed the Draft Local Plan for consultation on 18 October 2016. The formal 6-week consultation started on 31 October 2016 and ended on 12 December 2016. Full Council also agreed on 18 October 2016 that the Draft Local Plan policies should be treated as a material planning consideration when determining planning applications. The Planning Policy Team has produced a guidance note to officers in Development Management to ensure consistency of approach – this note is available on the Council's website.

2. Consultation on the Draft Local Plan was carried out in compliance with the Council's agreed Statement of Community Involvement and as agreed by Cabinet on 1 September 2016. Full details of the consultation strategy utilised by the Council and the engagement methods were reported to the earlier meeting of the Cabinet on 9 March 2017, together with the interim findings from the Questionnaire responses to the consultation that had been analysed at that time.

3. Since the Cabinet meeting in March, the detailed processing and analysis of all remaining consultation responses, including those received via letter and email, has been completed.

Summary of the Consultation

4. The Council received 3,387 responses from 3,072 respondents. 7% of responses were received through 'hardcopy' questionnaires, 22% via letter, 23% via email and 48% via online questionnaires. Quantitative analysis has been undertaken on the results of the tick-box questions in the questionnaire. Qualitative analysis has been undertaken on the open text in the questionnaire, letters, emails and supporting documents received as attachments.

5. To manage the volume of responses and ensure that all responses were considered consistently, a classification process was utilised. This consisted of establishing a detailed 'classification tree', which comprised a list of wide ranging categories covering key topics raised by respondents. The open text of the responses was then classified against these categories. Where responses covered a number of separate points these were separately classified against their respective categories, splitting each response in to a series of 'comments'. This classification process has ensured that the breadth and frequency of comments received has been captured and understood against recurring issues, enabling a more detailed analysis against the individual points raised.

6. Within the classification of feedback, respondents were assigned to a 'contact' group so it was possible to track the number of resident, agent/landowner or developer, business and statutory consultee responses, as well as being able to track the number of petitions and 'group form' multiple signatory responses.

7. Through the analysis undertaken by Remarkable, it has been possible to identify the 10 most frequently stated comments to the Draft Local Plan consultation. These can be summarised as follows:

- an increase in traffic congestion on local roads;
- a negative impact on local schools;
- increased pressure on the local healthcare provision;
- a loss of car parking spaces and increased car parking pressure;

- a negative impact on the character of settlements;
- increased overcrowding on the Central Line;
- a loss of managed open space in the urban areas of the District;
- comments regarding Draft Policy P 2 on the proposed site allocations in Loughton;
- insufficient information about the infrastructure requirements of the District; and
- general comments disagreeing with the principle of development in the Green Belt.

Consultation Report

8. An Executive Summary of the Consultation Report is provided as Appendix B. The full Consultation Report prepared primarily by the consultants Remarkable provides detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of the feedback received to the consultation, and is available as a background document to this report. Council officers were responsible for the sections summarising the comments received from stakeholders and other local organisations and those received from site promoters. The report includes details of:

- The Draft Local Plan Consultation Strategy (chapter 4);
- Who has responded to the consultation (chapter 5); and
- Analysis of responses received in relation to each section of the Draft Local Plan (chapters 6-15);

9. The appendices to the report also provide detailed breakdowns of the number of classified comments per topic / Draft Local Plan Policy.

10. 527 classified comments were received in support of the spatial strategy and site selection process. 240 of these stated a preference for allocating growth around Harlow, as identified in Draft Policy SP 3, and suggested that this was appropriate due to the new town status of Harlow and its associated infrastructure, as well as how it could benefit from additional investment. However, 2,180 classified comments disagreed with the site selection process (received from 966 respondents). This included 507 comments relating to sites that were perceived to be 'better' choices than those currently selected. 361 comments were received in relation to sites that are not identified for allocation. Whilst the majority of these came from site promoters for sites that have not been selected, this also included respondents who have questioned why a particular site they are aware of has not been selected, and feel is a better option for growth.

Statutory Consultees and Other Local Organisations

11. A summary of the key issues arising from the responses received from 'statutory consultees, Parish/Town Councils and other organisations' was included in the report to Cabinet on 9 March 2017 and further detail is set out in the Consultation Report. The Council is continuing to progress with responding to issues raised by way of further work as appropriate. The Council will continue to liaise closely with relevant statutory consultees in finalising the Local Plan and the evidence which supports it.

Site Selection Process

12. Since the previous cut-off date for the site selection process used to inform the Draft Local Plan 93 additional 'new' residential sites have been put forward for consideration by the Council in the finalisation of the Local Plan. Additionally, some landowners/site promoters have requested changes to the boundary of residential sites and 49 amended residential

sites will be assessed. Three sites have been withdrawn from consideration. The Council is now beginning the process of further detailed assessment of potential sites for consideration, taking into account comments received through the Draft Local Plan consultation, which will result in a further Site Selection process. The Site Selection process will also consider approximately 13 potential Employment and 14 potential Traveller sites, meaning that in total the Council will be assessing approximately 169 sites. The methodology for the site selection process will be published shortly on the Council's website. It is not possible to say at this stage whether or not any sites proposed for allocation in the Draft Local Plan will change through this process, but the Council is committed to assessing and evaluating all site options consistently and robustly in accordance with an agreed methodology and national planning policy guidance. This process will not consider sites which have been submitted to the Council after the cut-off date of 31 March 2017.

Further Work to Inform the Pre-Submission Local Plan

13. Work continues to progress key strands of the evidence base that will inform and support the Local Plan as follows:

(a) Work is continuing in partnership with Essex County Council to develop the Transport Assessment. Modelling is being undertaken in order to confirm the implications of planned growth on the transport network, and identify the necessary mitigation measures required to support future growth. This will include road and junction upgrades, in addition to sustainable transportation improvements to support a modal shift away from car use as far as possible.

(b) The Open Space, Playing Pitch and Indoor Sports Facilities Studies are progressing as scheduled. The studies will provide details of future standards, and identify where new provision is required, taking into account the growth plans set out within the Draft Local Plan.

(c) A programme of stakeholder engagement is underway in relation to the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP). The IDP will detail the key infrastructure requirements associated with growth and development set out within the Local Plan, together with funding and delivery arrangements.

(d) Work is progressing to identify the future employment requirements for the Functional Economic Market Area and for the District, which will help to inform future employment allocations to be included within the Local Plan.

14. Officers are working to respond to the representations and feedback received to the Draft Local Plan consultation, and progress the Plan accordingly. The Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Local Plan is due to be published in early 2018, at which stage the Council will invite comments in relation to the 'soundness' and 'legal compliance' of the Plan. The Local Plan will then be submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination-in-Public.

15. As part of the finalisation of the Plan, the Council is required to produce a Consultation Statement. This will need to set out how the Council has involved the local community, stakeholders and statutory bodies in the formulation of the Local Plan. Importantly, it will need to provide a summary of the main issues raised by the representations made, and also how any representations made have been taken into account in the plan preparation process.

16. Accordingly, Appendix A sets out a summary of the main issues raised through the Draft Local Plan consultation, and how these are being taken into account in the further plan preparation process. It is intended that Appendix A will ultimately form part of the Local Plan

Consultation Statement.

17. The key issues in managing the programme relate to resources, the ability of external organisations such as Essex County Council in providing timely inputs into plan preparation largely outside our control and the interconnectivity of the various workstreams. The importance of maintaining a full team of appropriately skilled and effective officers and consultants cannot be underestimated and there have been resource concerns with staff leaving/going on maternity leave.

18. In addition, the avoidance of diversion of resource to other tasks is a key concern, yet matters such as neighbourhood plan advice, development monitoring and assistance do need to be provided. Whilst progressing the Local Plan, Officers are also working to progress matters associated with the delivery of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, as well as working to establish appropriate mechanisms internally within the Council to ensure that the Local Plan can be effectively implemented (as reported to Cabinet on 15 June 2017).

Resource Implications:

The budget for analysis of Draft Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation was approved as part of the Local Plan budget in December 2016.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Council is required to prepare and maintain an up to date Local Plan to set out the strategic priorities for the area and the policies that address these.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The delivery of a Local Plan, informed by a robust evidence base, will contribute to safer, cleaner, greener objectives by planning for sustainable development.

Consultation Undertaken:

Full public consultation on the Draft Local Plan in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Local Plan Regulations 2012 and in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement involving residents, local businesses, neighbouring local authorities and statutory consultees as detailed in the report.

Background Papers:

- Epping Forest District Council Draft Local Plan Consultation Report (2017)
- National Planning Policy Framework (2012)
- Epping Forest District Draft Local Plan (2016)
- Local Plan Regulations (2012)
- Epping Forest Statement of Community Involvement (2013)
- Epping Forest Planning Policy Briefing Note version 2 (April 2017)

Risk Management:

The continued progression and implementation of the Local Plan is required in order to manage and mitigate the risks of potential speculative or uncoordinated development across the District. The adoption of the Local Plan will help to ensure that the Council is making adequate provision for the development and infrastructure needs of the District, including a sufficient supply of deliverable housing land as required by national planning policy.

The adoption of the Local Plan will ensure that the Council has a full suite of up to date planning policies to promote and manage high quality sustainable development in the District.

The Council needs to make timely progress on the preparation of a Local Plan to avoid the risk of intervention by the Secretary of State.