

MINUTES
of the
CHELMSFORD POLICY BOARD
held on 14 October 2021 at 7:00pm

Present:

Councillor I Fuller (Chair)

Councillors D Clark, G H J Pooley, R J Poulter, A Sosin, N Walsh and S Young

Also present: Councillor M J Mackrory

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors H Ayres, W Daden, J Galley, N Gulliver, G B R Knight, R T Whitehead and T N Willis. Councillor Ayres had appointed Councillor Young as her substitute.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded that they must disclose any interests they knew they had in items of business on the meeting's agenda and that they must do so at this point on the agenda or as soon as they became aware of the interest. If the interest was a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest they were also obliged to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the meeting. Any declarations are recorded in the relevant minute below.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting 5 July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. Public Questions

There were no questions or statements from members of the public.

5. Solar Farms Supplementary Planning Document

The Policy Board considered the results of public consultation on a draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which aimed to provide guidance on preparing, submitting and assessing planning proposals for solar farms proposals and their locations. The SPD took into account the requirements of national planning policy and guidance, local planning

policies and other relevant strategies. It provided practical advice for solar farm applicants, Council planners, local stakeholders and communities in the consideration of solar farm proposals.

It was suggested that, for clarity, in Appendix 2, the following amendments should be made:

- in paragraph number 7.17, after the word “public’s” and before the word “enjoyment” in the penultimate line, the words “and local residents” should be added, as should the words “at the expense of the applicant” at the end of the paragraph; and
- in paragraph 7.19 after the word “safety” , add “local residents”

Asked to clarify the meaning of paragraph 7.34, officers said that this related to possible future community ownership and stewardship schemes. How this might evolve in future developments was not yet clear but it could include the stewardship of assets through which energy was supplied to a particular development and the financial and governance arrangements that were needed to oversee and maintain those assets.

It was emphasised that in order to comply with the Local Plan and national planning policies on solar farms, and having regard to all material considerations, the SPD could only refer to preferred locations in general terms, rather than specific or prescribed locations, and that the merits of any given site could only be considered at the planning application stage. The general policies in the Local Plan would guide prospective developers on the types of site that would be acceptable and the suitability of specific sites could be discussed with them at the pre-application stage as set out in the guidance contained within Section 7 of the SPD.

RESOLVED that

1. The proposed changes to the SPD attached at Appendix 2 of this report to the meeting be agreed and that the Cabinet be recommended to approve the amended document.
2. It be recommended to the Cabinet that the amendments to paragraphs 7.17 and 7.19 set out above and any subsequent minor textual, presentational or layout amendments to the final version of the SPD is delegated to the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development.
3. The necessary legal and procedural processes be undertaken to adopt the SPD and that the Cabinet be recommended to authorise the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development to approve the necessary legal and procedural adoption material.

(7.03pm to 7.25pm)

6. First Homes Planning Advice Note

Members were informed that in May 2021, the Government had published a Written Ministerial Statement that set out plans for delivery of a new type of affordable home ownership product called First Homes. To support the future development of First Homes, the Government also set out changes to national planning policy, which now required that a minimum of 25% of all affordable housing units secured through developer contributions be delivered as First Homes.

Elements of the national criteria applying to First Homes, and the purchasers of First Homes, were fixed whilst some could be amended by local authorities. As this was a new requirement and there was no policy covering it in Chelmsford's Local Plan, a Planning Advice Note had been prepared.

The First Homes Written Ministerial Statement also introduced a First Homes exceptions site policy to encourage First Homes-led development on land that was not currently allocated for housing. The draft Planning Advice Note supported the Local Plan and supplementary planning documents by providing clarity in response to common queries, changes in national policy or updated evidence.

Asked how it would be ensured that affordable homes in rural exception sites would be made available in perpetuity to those who met the criteria, officers said that the separate rural exception process would continue to be secured through planning obligations and monitored by the local authority. Separate arrangements would exist for First Homes exception sites whereby the developer/vendor would need to declare to the Council that they were complying with any planning obligations relating to the disposal or resale of a property to qualifying residents.

In response to further questions, the Board was informed that:

- The cap on the size of First Home exception sites outside but to adjacent to Defined Settlements or the Urban Areas would be the same as that initially put forward in national policy for entry-level exception sites i.e. one hectare or five per cent of the size of the settlement, whichever was the lower. This would ensure that developments on, for example, the edge of smaller villages were not out of proportion to existing development.
- If there was no demand for properties provided through First Homes on a particular site, the developer would presumably seek to renegotiate that planning obligation, although national policy drafting assumed that such a situation would not arise and that there would be a demand for such properties.

If approved, the Advice Note would be the subject of consultation before being submitted to the Cabinet for approval.

RESOLVED that

1. The draft First Homes Planning Advice Note be approved for a 4-week technical consultation, the consultation feedback and any subsequent amendments to the draft

First Homes Planning Advice Note to be considered by Cabinet ahead of final approval.

2. The Director for Sustainable Communities, in consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development, be authorised to negotiate any final changes to the First Homes Planning Advice Note arising from the Policy Board ahead of targeted consultation.

(7.25pm to 7.47pm)

8. Chelmsford Policy Board Work Programme

The Board received the latest version of its Work Programme for 2021-22. Members agreed that an additional meeting of the Board should be held on 2 December 2021.

RESOLVED that the latest Work Programme of the Board be noted.

(7.47pm to 7.50pm)

9. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.50pm

Chair