

**MINUTES**  
of the  
**CHELMSFORD POLICY BOARD**  
held on 26 September 2024 at 7:00pm

Present:

Councillor C. Adutwim (Chair)

Councillors J. Deakin, I. Fuller, J. Jeapes, G. Pooley, S. Scott, A. Sosin, A. Thorpe-Apps, N. Walsh, R. Whitehead and S. Young

### 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs P Clark, Massey and O'Brien. Councillor Scott substituted for Cllr Massey.

### 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 on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

### 4. Public Questions

[Two public questions had been received in advance of the meeting, which related to Item 5 and can be viewed here.](#)

The first question was asked in person and related to J A Baker's book *The Peregrine*. The Board heard that the book remained a gold standard on nature and place and much of the landscape, where the book was set is to the east of Chelmsford, especially around Little Baddow. The Board heard the concern, that there was no reference to J A Baker in the Local Plan Preferred Options documents and were asked if they could ensure the countryside wrote about was given specific consideration, via a scheme proposed for its conservation in the Local Plan.

In response, officers agreed of the importance of the book and noted that it had been rightly recognised by the City Council with the current exhibition at the Museum. The Board heard however, that the role of the Local Plan, was to guide the location of much needed new development and to address heritage, landscape and ecology issues as required by the NPPF. The Board were informed that those matters needed to be addressed through the evidence

base, as in the existing Local Plan and during the review as well. The Board were informed that sites 16a and 16b, did not have a specific landscape designation or ecological designation, however the importance of maintaining landscapes and natural corridors was recognised. The Board heard that if therefore, those sites were carried forward, then the site policies could be strengthened to address those important issues and officers believed that was the document from which J A Baker's work could be considered. The Board were informed that the works of J A Baker could be incorporated into the production of a masterplan, to ensure that the important social and natural history was recognised and celebrated as part of a new development.

The second question was not asked in person, but had been circulated to the Board members prior to the meeting. The question asked why the residents objections surrounding their disabilities had been taken out of their published objection and if this had been done for everyone with disabilities. The Board heard this was discriminatory and were asked why this had been done.

In response, officers stated that the points raised were a sensitive matter as the Council needed to balance its duties of privacy, data protection and transparency. The Board heard that following legal advice, sensitive information in comments received were removed from publication on the Council's website, to comply with data protection legislation. It was noted that sensitive information could include specific health-related information which if revealed, would potentially be detrimental to the individual(s) concerned. The Board and the member of the public were assured by officers that the full content of all duly made representations would be considered by the Council in the normal way, and that could include the sharing of redacted individual comments with members. The Board heard that the purpose of the report however, was to set out the main issues arising from the consultation and not to report on all of the individual responses.

## 5. Chelmsford Local Plan – Preferred Options Consultation Feedback

The Board considered a report, which provided them with feedback on the main issues raised in the consultation responses to the Local Plan Preferred Options Document and Preferred Options Integrated Impact Assessment. It was noted that the report also provided the Board with information on the work being undertaken to prepare the Pre-Submission Local Plan. The Board heard that the consultation had run for six weeks, with activities including notification letters and emails, an online video, and staffed exhibitions amongst others. It was noted that a high level of response had been generated to the Preferred Options Local Plan consultation document with 10,418 comments from 3,678 respondents, which were summarised in Appendix 1, with the key main issues reported on rather than each individual comment. The Board heard that a wide range of feedback had been received, including support or qualified support from most Government or National bodies, a mix of support and opposition from Parish Tier Councils, with many suggesting changes, opposition to the proposed new development allocations in particular the Hammonds Farm and Junction 18 A12 sites and support from developers and landowners where their sites featured in the draft plan.

The Board also heard that 65 comments from 48 respondents had been received on the Preferred Options Integrated Impact Assessment document, with general support and some specific concerns on the questioning of the IIA scoring for specific indicators, objections to specific proposed strategic site allocations in respect of key sustainability criteria and an insufficient range of reasonable alternatives not being considered or appraised.

The Board were informed of the next steps the Council had to take, which were to consider the consultation responses in detail and to use them alongside the plan evidence base and Government Policy to inform the Pre-Submission Local Plan. The Board heard that new evidence base studies including further detailed Traffic Modelling and new Open Space and Air Quality Assessments were being prepared, discussions with duty bodies and infrastructure providers are continuing and the presentation of the Pre-Submission Local Plan to the Board anticipated in December 2024 would be alongside a 'You Said We Did' Feedback Report. The Board heard that the Pre-Submission Local Plan was expected to be consulted on in early 2025.

In response to questions from the Board, officers noted that;

- The approach under the transitional arrangements would be the most appropriate one going forward as there was no clear indication of when the new National Planning Policy Framework would be published. The consultation had only just closed after receiving over 10,000 responses and if the transitional arrangements were used, then the existing 2023 NPPF would be used, meaning there would not be a requirement for a green belt review.
- The Local Plan has to be reviewed every five years and any changes in a new NPPF would then be picked up at the next five year review, therefore it was believed that the correct way forward would be to continue with the transitional arrangements that are on offer if possible. It was noted that as a large proportion of the work around the review had already been carried out, it would be remiss to start again and then miss out on the work and the expense of the work already carried out.
- Decisions from Government on infrastructure, were keenly awaited by all Local Authorities, but officers could not plan for something that hadn't yet been confirmed, however when decisions were confirmed, they would be taken into account. It was also noted that the preferred options consultation had included a small buffer on housing numbers, therefore modelling and testing had been carried out on a higher number than required and that had been tested as part of the preferred options.
- The transitional arrangements would prevent a cliff edge effect, where the Council would have to restart the Local Plan review and would allow new National policies to be picked up at the next review as had been done with previous reviews. It was felt that the Council remained within the window of opportunity to continue with the current review and a delay would mean a delay in the implementation of the important policies that had already been pursued as part of the review.
- Inspectors would examine the local plan under the current NPPF rather than the new one and it was important to carry on and deliver growth, housing and employment in a timely way and that approach had led to the Council always having an up to date Local Plan in the past.
- It was not possible to say how much change there would be as a result of the preferred options feedback, but as in other instances, there would always be some change and that would be detailed at the December 2024 meeting of the Board.

**RESOLVED** that;

1. The Board notes the outcomes of the consultation contained within the covering report and attached at Appendices 1 and 2 and;
2. The Board notes the work being undertaken to prepare a Pre-Submission Local Plan and;
3. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford to make any necessary minor amendments to the Chelmsford Local Plan Preferred Options Feedback Report and Preferred Options Integrated Impact Assessment Feedback Report before publication as part of the Local Plan evidence base.

(7.17pm to 7.52pm)

## 6. Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2025-2030

The Board were asked to approve an updated Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy for external consultation. It was noted that the previous strategy had been published in 2020 and was due for review and replacement. The Board heard that a strategy had to be published at least every five years, outlining how homelessness and rough sleeping would be prevented and relieved. The Board heard that the refreshed strategy reflected the changing housing market conditions in the district and how the lack of accessible social and affordable homes impacted on people's ability to find and sustain permanent housing. The Board were informed that refreshing the strategy would allow the team to reset the priorities in line with the housing market conditions and reinvigorate activity in partnership to tackle homelessness, rough sleeping and the causes.

The Board were informed that the Council wanted to stimulate discussion with the public and stakeholders and use the information from them to assist with formulating an updated plan. It was noted that a number of sectors would be consulted with to see what partnership work could take place and to gather information. The Board also heard that the problem was a national one and it was important to understand and highlight the underlying causes and how different groups were affected. It was noted that it was important for the Council to continue to build strong relationships with external stakeholders and that extra work had been taking place with the Council's Communications team as a result.

In response to questions from the Board, officers noted that;

- Substance abuse led to around 10% of homelessness applications, but was not always the only cause in those cases. It was also noted that officers were keen to progress plans across a number of areas, including the one raised and would see how it could be incorporated within the revised strategy.
- Domestic abuse also led to a significant number of homelessness applications and was sadly higher in Chelmsford than the national level, but that work had been continuing with Essex Police and the Government had mentioned the area being a priority for them.
- It was hoped that the resources from Government to employ staff working on homelessness prevention would be retained and that the Council had become significantly better at reaching out to people who had become homeless or were at risk than in the past. It was noted that there were probably around 12-20 people sleeping rough in Chelmsford currently, but with a higher turnover each year than in previous years.
- It was difficult to quantify the effectiveness of preventative work as if you engage in a preventative way then the issue doesn't arise. It was also noted that the team wanted to work with the Citizens Advice Bureau and other groups to build a greater understanding and cohort of assistance from other bodies.
- It was expected that due to changing interest rates and the possibility of changes for buy to let landlords from the new Government, there would be less privately rented properties available on the market. It was noted that there was already a gap between demand and supply for privately rented properties and that this was likely to increase.
- The Council had successfully worked with some private landlords on the Private Sector Leases scheme and work would continue with the Association of Landlords. It was also noted that the topic overlapped, with the Housing Strategy.

The Board also considered whether a working group should be established ahead of the Strategy being considered at a meeting in January, to look at the strategy in greater detail in light of the consultation responses. Members of the Board asked for clarity on when the group

would meet, how often and what their specific role would be. Officers clarified that it would be a single meeting, rather than an ongoing working group, to specifically look at the consultation responses in early-mid December. It was agreed to hold a single focused meeting on that basis and officers informed the Board that they would circulate a terms of reference, to provide more details. It was also agreed that after receipt of the terms of reference, Democratic Services would liaise with Group Leaders to seek nominations for the meeting. The Board also agreed to add another recommendation to allow any typographical errors to be covered by officers in delegation with the Cabinet Member.

**RESOLVED** that;

1. The Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2025-2030 be approved for consultation as presented and;
2. Terms of Reference for a single focused meeting to consider the consultation responses, be circulated to Board Members by officers and nominations for the meeting be sought;
3. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford to make any necessary minor amendments to Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy.

(7.53pm to 8.28pm)

## 7. Work Programme

The Board considered an item detailing their future work programme. The Board agreed to reestablish the Waterways Working group, as detailed in the report and that nominations would be sought from Group leaders by Democratic Services. The Board also noted the addition of an item for the meeting on 7 November 2024, to consider revised Parking standards from the Essex Planning Officers Authority.

**RESOLVED** that;

1. The Work Programme be approved with the addition of the Parking Standards Item at the 7<sup>th</sup> November meeting and;
2. The Waterways Working Group be reestablished, with nominations to be sought from Group Leaders.

(8.29pm to 8.32pm)

## 8. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.32pm

Chair