

## MINUTES

of the

### CHELMSFORD POLICY BOARD

held on 3 December 2020 at 7.00pm

Present:

Councillor I Fuller (Vice-Chair in the Chair)

Councillors H Ayres, N Chambers, W Daden, J Galley, M Goldman, S Goldman, N Gulliver, G B R Knight, R Moore, G H J Pooley, R J Poulter, I Roberts, A Sosin, N Walsh, R T Whitehead and T N Willis

Also present:

Councillor M J Mackrory

#### 1. Attendance and Apologies for Absence

The attendance of those present was confirmed. There were no apologies for absence.

#### 2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 5 November 2020 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the addition of the words “and another had since been awarded” at the end of the last bullet point in the preamble to minute number 5.

#### 3. Declarations of Interest

All Members were reminded to disclose any interests in items of business on the meeting’s agenda and that they should do so at this point on the agenda or as soon as they became aware of the interest. They were also obliged to notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days of the meeting, if they had not previously notified her about it.

#### 4. Public Questions

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

## 5. Community Governance Review

The Terms of Reference for a proposed Community Governance Review were presented to the Board for consideration before their submission to Full Council on 9 December 2020. An update was also given on to the recent informal consultation carried out in advance of the review, from which it had been concluded that a broad review of the whole of the Chelmsford area would be preferable. The Terms of Reference indicated that there was likely to be a focus on the potential creation of new parishes and/or changing existing parish boundaries in the unparished areas, as well as changes resulting from housing development. This approach would also allow sufficient flexibility to address any community governance issues that emerged should that be necessary.

In response to a question on whether the review would take into account population increases as a result of major housing developments in parts of Chelmsford, the Board was informed that it was important for electoral purposes that it did so.

RESOLVED that the outcome of the informal consultation be noted and that the Council be recommended to approve the Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review.

(7.05pm to 7.16pm)

## 6. Response to Consultation on Longfield Solar Farm

The Policy Board was asked to approve a suggested response to the non-statutory consultation on the Longfield Solar Farm. The report summarised the matters on which views were being sought, the key proposals in so far as they impacted on the City Council's administrative area and provided a summary of the proposed consultation response which was set out in detail at Appendix 1 to the report.

The ensuing discussion centred on the following concerns:

- whilst accepting the need for clean and renewable energy, a proposal such as this needed to be located in the most appropriate place. In the case of the Longfield solar farm, agricultural land would be lost and, depending on the quality of the land, consideration needed to be given to whether the loss of productive land for food production would be outweighed by the environmental benefits the solar farm proposals would provide. It was suggested that the Council should produce a policy document to guide assessment of the relative merits of future renewable energy projects, especially whether they would have negative impacts on loss of agricultural land and biodiversity; and
- similarly, there was doubt that the reduction in carbon emissions resulting from energy produced by solar arrays was outweighed by the energy used in their manufacture and the environmental cost of end-of-life disposal of photovoltaic cells and batteries.

On the first of those points, the Board was informed that most of that part of the proposed area that was in Chelmsford was grade 2 agricultural land and a more detailed Agricultural Land Classification should be undertaken for the site. The wider environmental impact would be assessed by an Environmental Impact Assessment which would need to accompany the submission of a Development Consent Order. This would also look at the effect on the natural habitat, although it was acknowledged that in some respects such projects benefited biodiversity by allowing land to lie undisturbed for extended periods of time and to recover from intensive agricultural use.

With regard to the comparative emissions from the production and use of solar arrays, there was evidence to suggest that solar panels resulted in a far lower net production of carbon dioxide than energy generated from fossil fuels and the efficiency of their manufacture and operation was improving all the time. It remained the case that national policy accepted the need for and encouraged the use of renewable energy and therefore the promoters of this project did not need to establish the need for it. However, the need to make clear the net emissions benefits of the proposal would be included in the Council's response.

Other issues mentioned during the consideration of the report included:

- the need for those carrying out the project to take into account the possibility that it may coincide with the building of the North-East By pass and the widening of the A12, which together would have a significant impact on traffic;
- a suggestion that the developers also consider providing wind turbines as part of the development; and
- the wish of members that the developers actively consider enabling part of the energy produced from the array to be used for the new housing development in the north of Chelmsford rather than being entirely directed to the national grid;

The Board concluded that, on balance, the Longfield solar farm was required in principle but that in the response the developers should be told that the Board wishes to draw their attention to the following:

- the need to recognise that there is a balance to be struck between the benefits of renewable energy, the loss of agricultural land and the impact of such developments on biodiversity;
- the need to provide evidence that the development will result in a net reduction in carbon dioxide emissions;
- the hope of the Council that part of the energy produced by the Longfield Farm site can be used by new housing developments in the north of Chelmsford;
- the need to take into account the possibility that this development will be constructed at the same time as the North-East By Pass and the widening of the A12 and the combined effect this would have on traffic in the area; and
- the desirability of including wind turbines as part of the development.

RESOLVED that the proposed response to the non-statutory consultation on the Longfield Solar Farm set out in Appendix 1 to the report to the meeting be approved, subject to the

inclusion of the additional comments set out above, and that the final response be sent to the Chair, Vice Chair and spokespersons for the opposition groups before it is formally submitted.

(7.16pm to 8.03pm)

## 7. Chelmsford Policy Board Work Programme

The Board received the latest version of its Work Programme for 2020/21. Members were informed that the Masterplan for Land at East Chelmsford was likely to be considered at its March meeting and that for Land at Great Leighs would be considered later in 2021. Supplementary Planning documents on Planning Obligations and Making Places would be submitted to the meeting on 14 January 2021.

RESOLVED that the latest Work Programme of the Board, as updated at the meeting, be noted.

(8.03pm to 8.06pm)

## 8. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.06pm

Chair