

MINUTES
of the
CHELMSFORD POLICY BOARD
held on 1 October 2020 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor I Fuller (Vice-Chair in the Chair)

Councillors H Ayres, W Daden, J Galley, M Goldman, S Goldman,
D Jones, G B R Knight, R Moore, J A Potter, R J Poulter, I Roberts, A Sosin,
M Steel, N Walsh, R T Whitehead and T N Willis

Also present:

Councillors A Davidson, C Davidson, R J Hyland, M J Mackrory and S R Robinson

1. Attendance and Apologies for Absence

The attendance of those present was confirmed. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors G H J Pooley, N Chambers and N Gulliver, who had appointed Councillors D Jones, J A Potter and M Steel respectively as their substitutes.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings on 16 and 23 July 2020 were confirmed as correct records.

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

No questions were asked or statements made by members of the public.

5. Consultation on Planning for the Future White Paper and Changes to the Current Planning System

The Board considered a suggested response by officers to the Government's consultation on the "Planning for the Future White Paper" on which it had invited comments by 29 October 2020. Comments on a technical document that accompanied the White Paper entitled "Changes to the Planning System" had been requested by 1 October 2020. The Council's views on that had been submitted by the Director of Sustainable Communities after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development and were included on the Green Sheet of additional information circulated before the meeting.

Members received a presentation by officers on the 24 proposals of the White Paper which covered three main elements:

- Land use planning and the preparation and examination of Local Plans
- Improving the design and sustainability of development
- Streamlining developer obligations and contributions

In the view of officers, the proposals that streamlined and speeded up the plan-making process were to be welcome but there were concerns about other aspects of the White Paper, especially in the areas of public engagement and developer contributions for infrastructure provision. Officers added that the intention to report soon to the Board on the Local Development Scheme had been put on hold pending an assessment of the effect of this and future expected consultations on changes to the planning system and Local Plans.

In discussing the White Paper members agreed that there were several key areas of concern which they felt should be emphasised in the response to the Government. They feared that the proposals would result in:

- (a) a reduction in public engagement and consultation in the production of Local Plans and the reduction or removal of the right for residents to object to subsequent planning applications near them;
- (b) the granting of automatic planning permission for developers to build on land identified as 'for growth';
- (c) the removal of section 106 payments and the Community Infrastructure Levy for infrastructure and their replacement with a national levy, to the probable disadvantage of Chelmsford;
- (d) an increase in the number of dwellings required to be built in the future per annum from 805 in the recently adopted Local Plan, which had been locally assessed, to in excess of 1,500pa using the Government's new national method, a 94% increase;

- (e) a reduction in the delivery of more genuinely affordable housing, whereas the focus should be on accelerating that delivery to meet the increasing demand;
- (f) a watering down of the importance of environmental assessments and not sufficiently taking into consideration the provisions in the Climate Change Act 2008 that addressed carbon dioxide emission standards for future housing stock; and
- (g) archaeology and heritage being put at risk by undermining pre-commencement archaeological conditions.

Other issues raised during the discussion were that the White Paper did not address the problem of developers failing to implement planning permissions in a timely manner and whether there should be penalties for their failure to do so; that it did not have sufficient regard to the importance of masterplanning in creating successful and sustainable developments; and, importantly, that it failed to provide a solution to the central question of how to ensure that more houses were built that met people's needs.

Responding to questions from the Board, officers said that

- attempts were made to integrate Neighbourhood Plans in the planning process and to collaborate with parish councils to co-ordinate those plans with the Local Plan. To what extent that would be affected by the White Paper was not clear;
- it appeared that a Neighbourhood share would be retained under the new Infrastructure levy for local infrastructure projects; and
- the reformed levy arrangements would place a greater financial burden and risk on local authorities.

The Board recognised that members may have other comments on the White Paper and asked that those be forwarded to the Director for Sustainable Communities who, with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development, would consider their inclusion in the official response to the consultation.

RESOLVED that

1. The proposed consultation response to the White Paper "Planning for the Future" set out in Appendix 1 of the report to the meeting be approved, subject to any changes the Director of Sustainable Communities and the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development consider necessary to finalise it, and submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
2. The proposed consultation responses should be amended to reflect and emphasise concerns that the proposals in the White Paper will:
 - (a) Reduce public engagement and consultation in the production of Local Plans and reduce or remove the right for residents to object to subsequent planning applications near them.
 - (b) Grant automatic planning permission for developers to build on land identified as 'for growth'.

- (c) Remove section 106 payments and the Community Infrastructure Levy for infrastructure and their replacement with a national levy which will almost certainly be to Chelmsford's disadvantage.
 - (d) Increase the number of dwellings required to be built in the future per annum from 805 in the Local Plan adopted this year, which was locally assessed, to in excess of 1,500pa using the Government's new national method, a 94% increase.
 - (e) Reduce the delivery of more genuinely affordable housing whereas the focus should be on accelerating that delivery to meet the increasing demand.
 - (f) Water down the importance of environmental assessments and not sufficiently take into consideration the provisions in the Climate Change Act 2008 that address carbon dioxide emission standards for future housing stock.
 - (g) Put at risk archaeology and heritage by undermining pre-commencement archaeological conditions.
3. The Policy Board resolves to instruct the Chief Executive and Leader of the City Council to write to the three Members of Parliament for Chelmsford setting out the Council's reservations and concerns about the proposals in the White Paper and asks them to express those concerns to the Secretary of State for Housing and Local Government in their capacity as local Members.
 4. It further resolves to remind all Members of the City Council of the need to respond to the consultation individually and recommends that they copy their responses to our three Members of Parliament so that they may be aware of the concerns of the City Council.

(7.05pm to 8.31pm)

6. Inspector's Main Modifications to the North Essex Authorities' Joint Section 1 Draft Local Plan

Officers had prepared for the Board's consideration a suggested response to the consultation on the North Essex Authorities' Shared Strategic (Section 1) Local Plan. That Local Plan concerned the principle of development of the three new Garden Communities at the locations west of Braintree (Rayne, Gt Sailing), Colchester/Braintree Borders (Marks Tey area) and Colchester/Tendring Borders (Essex University/Wivenhoe area).

The first two locations had been withdrawn following the Examination of the Local Plan and the present consultation concerned only the location on the Colchester/Tendring border. As development at that location would have limited impact on Chelmsford, officers had few comments to make on it. However, the withdrawal of two of the development sites raised questions as to how the authorities in the north of Essex would meet their housing requirements. This would become clearer once the Part 2 Local Plan was produced and the effect of any proposals on Chelmsford was known.

RESOLVED that the consultation response to the 'North Essex Authorities Shared Strategic (Section 1) Local Plan – Section 1 Proposed Main Modifications Consultation' set out in Appendix 1 to the report to the meeting be approved.

(8.31pm to 8.35pm)

7. Chelmsford Policy Board Work Programme

The Board received the latest updated version of its Work Programme for 2020/21.

Officers were asked whether concerns raised by a recent study of the effect of traffic on the B1418 on people's health, and questions about whether this would be exacerbated by the proposed development area to the north of South Woodham Ferrers, would affect the timing of the Board's consideration of the Masterplan for that area. The Board was told that officers would consider that and other issues associated with the site and bring the Masterplan to the Policy Board once all relevant matters had been assessed.

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

(8.35pm to 8.43pm)

8. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.43pm

Chair