

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-019-2016/17
Date of meeting: 1 September 2016



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Planning Policy

Subject: Draft Local Plan Consultation Strategy

Responsible Officer: Cassandra Polyzoides (01992 564119).

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To agree the consultation strategy for the Draft Local Plan as set out in Appendix 1.**

Executive Summary:

This report seeks agreement to the consultation strategy for the forthcoming Regulation 18 consultation on the Draft Local Plan scheduled for 31 October 2016 to 12 December 2016. Following the Local Plan Issues and Options consultation the Council has reviewed the methodologies used and comments received. In deciding the best consultation approaches for the Draft Local Plan, lessons learned and previously used and useful engagement practices were considered. Members requested that officers commission a PR consultancy (Remarkable consultants) to offer specialist support and to review the Council's engagement methods to date, the adopted Local Plan consultation strategy, and Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The outcome of the review has resulted in the proposed Draft Local Plan consultation strategy submitted for approval, which has been used to guide the approach to be taken for the upcoming statutory consultation.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The Council is required to follow the engagement methods as outlined in the Statement of Community Involvement adopted in 2013. In addition and in order to ensure that the consultation for the Draft Plan is successful, consultants have been commissioned to update the Council's consultation strategy ensuring that is in line with the SCI, the Council's adopted Local Plan consultation strategy and takes into account the lessons learned from previous engagement exercises.

Other Options for Action:

To not approve the Draft Local Plan consultation strategy

Report:

1. The preparation of the Local Plan for Epping Forest District is an on-going and complex process. The level of expert evidence that is required to support the emerging Local Plan is significant. The guidance on exactly what this should cover continues to evolve in light of the National Planning Policy Framework and its associated Guidance, and emerging Inspectors'

reports into other Local Plan Examinations around the country. There is a requirement for the Council to prepare an SCI which outlines the minimum required approach to be followed during the Local Plan consultations. This document was used in addition to officer and Member input, to prepare the Draft Local Plan consultation strategy. Epping Forest District Council has appointed PR consultants Remarkable to lead on the production of the consultation strategy and a timetable for its implementation as outlined in the main document.

2. Epping Forest District Council is committed to effective consultation and is seeking to build on the engagement undertaken as part of the Issues and Options consultation (Community Choices) in 2012 which received 3,556 responses, representing a total of 5,989 people. The consultee database used for the Community Choices consultation now contains 11,813 records. The consultation on the Draft Plan proposes to build on this and work towards the following objectives:

- (a) be clear, timely, meaningful and inclusive;
- (b) build on the lessons learnt from previous consultations;
- (c) tell the story of the Local Plan so far and the process moving forward;
- (d) promote and raise awareness of the consultation period and the opportunities to have your say;
- (e) outline the preferred options, how they have been determined and why;
- (f) achieve a greater level of response from a wider proportion of stakeholders;
- (g) use digital platforms and innovative content to engage a wider audience; and
- (h) involve the local community and listen to their comments.

3. The consultation strategy for the Draft Local Plan (attached at Appendix 1) broadly outlines the following approaches to be used:

- (a) A new, improved and dedicated website, to be used for background evidence, provide updates, social media feeds, video and for the submission of consultation questionnaires;
- (b) media briefings;
- (c) information leaflet distribution;
- (d) Tube station postcard handouts;
- (e) static information points across the District;
- (f) staffed exhibitions;
- (g) Member and resident association toolboxes; and
- (h) one-to-ones with Town & Parish Councils and developers;

4. There are three Phases proposed for the current consultation as outlined in the strategy.

Phase 1: 'Raising Awareness'

5. In this phase the emphasis is to tell the story so far, outlining the context and purpose to the Local Plan, re-emphasising the emerging vision for the District and the process undertaken so far. This will be complemented by explaining the process moving forward and promoting the ways and means of getting involved. It will be implemented using the following tools:

- Revised Key Messages;
- Website;
- Video;
- Infographics;
- Councillor toolbox;
- Media relations; and
- Preparation of consultation materials.

6. The preparation of the above tools be completed in July and August 2016 for promotion from September onwards.

Phase 2: 'Securing Engagement'

7. Once the initial 'raising awareness' steps, are completed a series of public exhibitions both staffed and unstaffed will be arranged during the statutory consultation period. This will ensure that the local community has an opportunity to speak face-to-face with the EFDC officers. A Full Council meeting will take place on the 18 October 2016 for members to agree to the consultation of the Draft Local Plan. If agreed, the Draft Plan consultation is scheduled to run for six weeks between 31 October 2016 and 12 December 2016. Key events for this phase include:

- (a) media launch event;
- (b) broadcast media and one-to-one sessions;
- (c) adverts in press;
- (d) press releases and interview;
- (e) information leaflet to every household (potentially via royal mail);
- (f) design of the leaflet;
- (g) consultee letter;
- (h) commuter postcards;
- (i) email mailings;
- (j) project website;
- (k) video;
- (l) infographics; and

- (m) Twitter / Facebook.

Phase 3: 'Feedback and Staying Informed'

8. To ensure there is every opportunity for stakeholders to provide their feedback, multiple methods will be provided. However, we will be encouraging as many people as possible to submit their comments online, so that it is easy for them to be considered and for analysis to take place efficiently.

9. Following the conclusion of the statutory public consultation period, the consultants will collate the feedback into a comprehensive Consultation Report with initial analysis undertaken so that officers can assess and make any necessary amendments to the Draft Plan. The Consultation Report is fundamental in detailing and evidencing the consultation that has been undertaken. The consultation report will be pulled from feedback secured via the website and by post. Darzin – a consultation analysis tool will be used to analyse the data. In addition to the Consultation Report, Remarkable Engagement will produce a short summary of the results which will be published via:

- (a) the local media;
- (b) updates to the website;
- (c) social media posts and infographics; and
- (d) further e-shot.

10. It will be important to keep people informed, therefore once the consultation report is completed; Remarkable will review the forward strategy with Epping Forest District Council in supporting the pre-submission publication and Local Plan submission stages. As an indicative measure it is envisaged that we would undertake the following to keep people informed:

- E-newsletter update;
- Council bulletin update;
- Member briefing; and
- Website and social media updates.

11. Planning Policy Officers will also be available to support stakeholders (residents and developers) at set times during the consultation period, to field questions and offer support on submitting the consultation questionnaire.

Resource Implications:

The costs for the consultant's fees are included in the Local Plan budget.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Council is required to prepare an SCI but not a detailed consultation strategy. It however has been deemed important that over time consultation strategies be developed to ensure the best approaches are followed during the statutory Local Plan consultations.

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:

N/A.

Background Papers:

Local Plan Statement of Community Involvement (February 2013)

Local Plan Consultation strategy (2013)

Risk Management:

Preparation of the Local Plan is a key priority for the Council and it is important that our approach to public consultations is reviewed and updated in line with best practice and the needs of our stakeholders.

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

The consultation strategy has taken into account comments from the previous statutory consultation (Issues & Options) in order to improve the methods of engagement e.g better website, improved and simplified questionnaire.

EFDC has followed a thorough and extensive consultation approach taking into account the needs of all stakeholders, including those harder to reach groups.

An EqIA was prepared for the Community Choices statutory consultation and will be reviewed for the Draft Plan consultation.