

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest by Members of the Council under this item.

36. ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Announcements by the Chairman of Council

(i) Chairman's Events

The Chairman informed Members that he had attend a variety of events which included meeting the Youth Council, the Costermongers Festival at Guildhall, the Chairman's Charity Golf Day, the launch of the Epping Forest Recycling Rewards Scheme and the Annual Petanque Match with Epping Town Council.

It was noted that the Chairman's Carol Service had changed dates and would now be held on 8 December 2017 at St John's Church, Epping.

(ii) Floral Display

The Chairman announced that he intended to send the flowers from tonight's meeting to the mother of the young boy who had been recently victim of anti-social behaviour in Waltham Abbey.

(iii) Change of Date for Council

The Council approved the change of date for the Council meeting scheduled on Thursday 2 November 2017, to be held Wednesday 1 November 2017.

37. RE-ORDER OF AGENDA

The Chairman advised that with the consent of the Council, the three public questions which had been submitted after the publication of the agenda, under agenda item 7, Public Questions would be brought forward as the next item of business.

38. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

(a) **Future Crèche Facilities at the Loughton Leisure Centre**

Question from Tina Stelfox to Councillor H Kane, Leisure & Community Services Portfolio Holder

"Given the documented concerns to Councillors and Places for People Leisure about the intended closure of the crèche on the Loughton Leisure Centre site and support for maintaining a crèche: We would like to know what plans are in place by the Epping Forest District Council to ensure that crèche facilities are maintained on the Loughton Leisure Centre site by the Places for People Leisure who have a 20 year contract."

Reply of Councillor H Kane, Leisure and Community Services Portfolio Holder

"Thank you for your question. It is true that after extensive search for suitable space- while the refurbishment work is in process- this has proven impossibility.

You see the safeguard of the children during any building works cannot be jeopardised; so, for the duration of the building the crèche has to close.

Going forward, I have requested the contractor for any possible extension to the existing plans in order to accommodate the crèche. As soon as we have the costs involved, I will be raising the matter to my fellow Cabinet members for support and decision.”

(b) Closure of the Crèche at the Loughton Leisure Centre

Question from Neena Freeman to Councillor H Kane, Leisure & Community Services Portfolio Holder

“Given that the Places for People management have now written informing of the closure of the crèche facility (which has been there over 14 years) at Loughton Leisure Centre on 20th October 2017 with no consultation with users, how does the council justify this discrimination against these users, many of whom have been members for years and have exercised up until the birth of the children using the crèche?”

Reply of Councillor H Kane, Leisure and Community Services Portfolio Holder

“Thank you for your question. Discrimination is a very strong word to use. I understand your frustration and concerns but I do not agree with the term used here. I will explain.

First of all, this Council is proud of its history of providing leisure and cultural activities, which are not a statutory obligation. Indeed, as local government is under increasing financial pressure and subject to reduction in revenue funding from the central government, discretionary services such as Leisure and Cultural services, in many other authorities, have been subject to cuts.

The management of the procurement to appoint a new contractor was undertaken by a multi-disciplinary officer project team, who reported to the Portfolio Advisory Group. I established this group of members from all political parties to offer advice and guidance to me determining not only the best procurement and contractual options, but also the service specification and scope of any new facilities. This was the group who made the final recommendations to the Cabinet, on the preferred bidder, Places for People.

The crèche in Loughton was not in the tender specification, because there has never been a purposed built crèche there. It was at the discretion, management and subsidy of the contractor in response to local circumstances and temporary demand.

The Council provides crèche facilities in other leisure centres i.e. Epping; and as I said before, I am still looking for a solution in the Loughton centre. So, I do not think that there is any doubt that there is still a lot of work to be done.”

(c) Local Plan – Call for Sites Methodology

Question from John Collins to Councillor J Philips. Planning & Governance Portfolio Holder

“Bearing in mind the examples given below in respect of sites that have not been included in the Council’s preferred sites lists, are the Council and Portfolio Holder satisfied that the process and criteria are being applied rigorously enough and do

they agree that where the reasons given for sites not being selected are incorrect, sites ought to be re-checked and the precise reason for inclusion and exclusion ought to be re-checked against the agreed set of criteria with consideration being consistent across sites ?”

Reply of Councillor J Philips, Planning and Governance Portfolio Holder

“1) Is the Council and Portfolio Holder satisfied that the process and criteria are being applied rigorously enough?

The decision-making process that underpins the selection of sites taken forward within the Local Plan is set out within the Council’s Site Selection Methodology (‘SSM’) which is published on the website. To be adequate, the Local Plan evidence base must be robust and assessments should be founded upon a cogent methodology, undertaken in a transparent manner and fully documented at key stages. A significant body of work therefore underpins the SSM, and accordingly it takes into account:

- Relevant government policy and practice guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance respectively; and
- Work undertaken elsewhere in the country by a number of other planning authorities at varying stages of plan making, including from adopted plans.

The Site Selection Methodology provides a detailed breakdown of the various sources of decision making criteria that have shaped the overall outcome.

With regard to the District’s Green Belt, this has been objectively assessed and reviewed. The NPPF at para 79 states that “*the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence*”. The Framework goes on to provide a number of points which local planning authorities must consider in reviewing the Green Belt within its administrative boundary. Building on national guidance, and national best practice, the Council undertook a Green Belt review in two stages in 2015 and 2016 (both documents are also on the website). In summary, the Stage 1 assessment provided a high-level review of the Green Belt’s overall performance, whilst Stage 2 reviewed in more detail the parcels within the Green Belt. The findings of this study were used to inform the site selection process therefore ensuring consistency between studies.

I am satisfied that a robust and thorough approach to both site selection and the assessment of the Green Belt has been followed. The methodologies used for the site selection process and Green Belt review are firmly based on national policy and guidance, and have taken account of national best practice elsewhere.

2) Do they agree that where the reasons given for sites not being selected are incorrect, sites ought to be re-checked? Where the reasons given for sites not being selected are incorrect, sites ought to be re-checked and the precise reason for inclusion and exclusion ought to be re-checked against the agreed set of criteria with consideration being consistent across sites?

Local plan-making is informed by a range of evidence provided at multiple stages. The Council undertook its Regulation 18 consultation in late 2016, and the public and landowners were invited to submit comments on the sites proposed for allocation. In a number of cases, new or updated material was made available to the Council for the first time. In all cases, where received, this material has been reviewed to

determine whether or not it materially alters the initial assessment of sites. The Council is therefore confident in the rigour and consistency that has been applied to the assessment.

I consider that the site selection process has been undertaken objectively and comprehensively. New and updated information supplied by agents has been assessed and appraised. The Council therefore remains confident in its assessment of sites and a detailed exercise of re-checking sites would be unnecessary and would only serve to introduce delays to the plan-making process. This is clearly neither in the interest of the Council, the residents of the District or the district's landowners."

Supplementary Question from John Collins to Councillor J Philips, Planning & Governance Portfolio Holder

"If there were mistakes within the process over all and the Local Plan encountered problems at the Examination in Public, would it not end up a slower process overall?"

Reply of Councillor J Philips, Planning and Governance Portfolio Holder

"I am confident that the work carried out by the Council has been successful and properly prepared as it could be at this stage of the process. The Council had carried out significant consultations in comparison to other neighbouring authorities and after consulting an experienced Inspector, I am confident in the Council's Local Plan. Where new information has come forward, I have been satisfied that it had been looked into properly and therefore, feel that the Council will be in a good position when it comes to the public examination."

39. ROGER HIRST, THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR ESSEX

The Police and Crime Commissioner, Roger Hirst made a short presentation updating Members on the overall strategy, funding and resources, since their last visit in February 2017, along with the District Commander, Lewis Basford for Epping Forest and Brentwood.

The Police and Crime Commissioner explained that the rise in the Police precept supported the on going reductions in Central Government grants, increased the amount of Police Offices and Staff and new technology.

The District Commander advised that the night time economy issues within Loughton had been alleviated, some what by the closure and restriction put on the former Nu and Luxe Bars. The anti-social behaviour issues in Epping High Street and Waltham Abbey were being dealt with although not completely resolved and they were working closely with the Council's Communities Safety Team on other issues.

Members asked questions about late night establishments, anti social behaviour, whether the police could increase their visibility, issues with response times, serious road accidents, the possibility of Secondary Schools regaining Police Liaison Officers, dangerous parking with police assistance, speed traps, motorbike issues on open green spaces, the impact of mental health on the police service and updates on vacant police buildings within the district.

40. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER NOTICE

The Council noted that there were no members questions submitted for consideration at the meeting.