

ESSEX PLANNING OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

Minutes of meeting held on 7th September 2017

At Discovery Centre - Braintree

<p>PRESENT: Graham Thomas (Chair) ECC Andy Millard – Thurrock Matthew Thomas – Rochford Amanda Parrott – Basildon Matthew Winslow – Basildon Catherine Bicknell – Tendring Jeremy Potter – Chelmsford Steve Rogers - Castle Point Ian Vipond – Colchester Nigel Richardson – Epping Forest Phil Drane – Brentwood Richard Greaves – ECC Diane Cooper – Harlow Tessa Lambert – Braintree Matthew Thomas – Rochford Gordon Glenday – Uttlesford</p>	<p>Sam Graves (minute taker)</p> <p>Guests: Graham Holmes – Uttlesford (GTAA) Peter Dawson – Place Services (EDG) Lewis Herbert – Anglia Ruskin University John Cuthbertson - ECC</p>
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No.	Agenda item	Action
1.	<p>Introduction & Apologies: Introductions were made and the following apologies noted.</p> <p>Diane Logue – Castle Point Peter Geraghty – Southend Emma Goodings - Braintree</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes and Actions from Previous Meeting 22nd June 2017 These were agreed as an accurate record</p> <p><u>Recruitment and Retention -Update</u> RG confirmed the “virtual” Task and Finish team is up and running to take forward the recruitment and retention piece of work on behalf of EPOA. He explained there are several strands of work including; education requirements and the technical apprenticeship opportunities. There are opportunities to work with Oakland’s, and Moulton College in Northamptonshire.</p> <p>In addition, early conversations have been held with Anglia Ruskin University to explore opportunities. This still leaves further work to look at how we retain and recruit qualified and experienced planning officers which is probably where the biggest shortage in public sector is. RG explained this is something the team will be exploring further.</p>	RG to action

	<p>PD – explained that he had recently received 30 applicants for two new graduate positions, interviewed 10 and gave three jobs. All are new to the profession coming in with zero experience; hence there will be a lot of training offered. There are many Essex graduates applying for the jobs, but the timing of advertising is critical; to place this at the right time of the year to attract high calibre graduates.</p> <p>TL referred to the fact that Braintree had considerable interest (10-15 applicants) for their technical apprenticeship posts.</p> <p>MW – Basildon have entry level technician roles which have a 2-4 year career development scheme structure.</p> <p>NR – Epping have two fixed term trainee graduate posts which he has successfully recruited to.</p> <p>RG – In relation to the next steps, Richard referred to the fact the LGA have circulated a MOU to all local authorities recently and urged all of the Essex local authorities to sign up to this. This is something that the LGA are leading on and coordinating. There are 10 points listed in the MOU. It was agreed that this group needs to report back to the December EPOA meeting with a recruitment and retention Action Plan for consideration, which aligns and works with the wider LGA regional work.</p> <p>There is a critical need to secure both new graduates, but more importantly experienced senior and principal planners, if we are going to be able to step-up and deliver the scale of growth planned in Essex. And more importantly, ensure that what is built is in the right places, have the right infrastructure and built to a good quality. There is a national shortage of town planners which is most acutely felt in areas under pressure from growth such as Essex.</p>	RG to action
3.	Notice of AOB: Viability - Dianne Cooper	
4.	<p>GTTA – Update and timetable, including how we address the outstanding issue of transit sites</p> <p>Graham Holmes introduced this item, referring to a briefing note he had prepared which was circulated with the agenda. He explained this pan – Essex work was commissioned back in 2015 and has been project managed by Uttlesford District Council with the support of an EPOA Steering Group which last met in March.</p> <p>Through discussion it was highlighted that there is a 300% increase in traveller encampments across the county.</p> <p>GH explained a further Steering Group meeting has now been set-up with the consultants ORS for early October to agree how this work is taken forward at a faster pace, how we address some of the issues raised by different Councils and how the county-wide issues including transit sites can be properly addressed.</p> <p>GT – Expressed concern that this work has been underway for some considerable time and this really needs to be moved forward at pace, given the pressing need for this evidence to support Local Plans and also the need</p>	

	<p>to address the outstanding transit site requirements. Equally, it was felt that when each new district section has been completed this needs to be shared to ensure the bigger geography is properly understood.</p> <p>The meeting agreed continuing support for ORS to conclude their work on the individual District chapters of the GTAA and the need to pull this work together into a single document as well as addressing the outstanding transit site requirements. It is understood the previous version of this work identified the need for two transit sites.</p> <p>Clarification, was sought on whether the current ORS commission required the consultants to do both pieces of work? GH was not certain, but agreed to confirm this requirement in the original commission. This will need to be clarified before the next Steering Group meeting in October.</p> <p>Note -Subsequent to the meeting, this point has been clarified and ORS do need to address the transit site requirements as part of their current commission.</p> <p>Following a healthy discussion the meeting agreed the following actions were required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPOA directors want to see the consultant’s pick-up the pace of this work, and a Steering Group meeting held with ORS (consultants) quickly to review the overall Essex GTAA position. It was agreed, that this is not simply a sum total of the individual District chapters. • This Steering Group meeting will need to focus on finding an agreed way forward to address the transit requirements. • Update current individual and new GTAA reports to reflect the wider position and need for further robust evidence; • Review this position against the current specification for the Essex Wide GTAA; • Scope the next project brief including Basildon BC to ensure transit need issues are addressed jointly through the Duty to Cooperate. • It was also agreed that the individual chapters sent to LPA’s need to be shared. 	GH to action
5.	<p>Strategic Planning – The Cambridgeshire Combined Authority Approach</p> <p>Lewis Herbert – gave a PowerPoint presentation on the strategic planning work that is being delivered by the Combined Authority in Cambridgeshire. He explained that he has been asked to lead on strategic planning on behalf of the Mayor of Cambridgeshire. He also referenced the fact that the combined authority has a very strong inclusive growth agenda.</p> <p>He explained Cambridgeshire needs to respond to a growth agenda to provide for 100,000 new homes and new employment space for additional science, biomedical and employment sites as well as high quality office space. Much of this planned growth is now allocated in Local Plans and coming forward through strategic sites and a programme of new settlements surrounding Cambridge, including Cambourne, Northstowe, Alconbury and</p>	

now Waterbeach. In addition to securing additional funding for being a Combined Authority area, Cambridgeshire has also previously secured funding through being designated a City Deal area. Successful collaboration by the Cambridgeshire authorities has unlocked considerable additional investment than would otherwise have been available.

The strategic planning approach applied in Cambridgeshire has been developed through partnership working, it has come through the various Local Plan work coming together, working from the bottom-up. It is a non-statutory Strategic Plan.

He noted that to be successful as a group of local authorities which is capable of attracting interest and investment from Central Government and government departments requires the following factors to be in place:

- Being able to demonstrate additionality – whether homes or jobs over and above what is expected/required;
- Establish grown-up politics, and have a strong political commitment – the Leaders need to be the most important people;
- Identify choices;
- Being discerning, and being able to highlight the most challenging issues within an area (not everything is doable),
- Partnership and collaborative working is absolutely critical;
- To have agreed housing numbers across a wider geography and being capable of working to a common time horizon and align Local Plan timetables.

LH- explained that even with the additional sources of capital funding secured, there are still barriers in Greater Cambridge to growth. There remains an infrastructure deficit, not enough homes or affordable homes. There are also skills “cold spots”, whilst a loss of core government revenue funding will have an impact £1100 net cost a year per new home.

It was highlighted that there is nothing to stop county proposals for growth. The Mayor is currently undertaking a study on extending the M11 and a study on A10 corridor. Based on local and county plans, there is also the proposal of trying to secure a Cambridge South station. It was mentioned that getting all parties on board is critical to realise the outputs of big projects.

Recognising the regional context is good practice and collaborative work will only open more doors.

SR – Interested to get a view of how the leaders agreed to sign-up to this. LH explained leaders have the ability to make things happen when working together and in their own authorities. They can bring their strategies beyond the Local Plan.

LH - There is a regional conference planned for the 23rd November in London and the invite will go to; Leaders, chief executives, transport, planning, and infrastructure officers. Cambridge will now be able to cope with growth and may need to further review the greenbelt as it has in the past. The Cambridgeshire greenbelt has always been reviewed and amended through various Local Plan iterations to provide space for the science and biomedical

	<p>campuses for example.</p> <p>GT – It is interesting to note that grown-up politics and leadership, collaborative working and the aligning of Local Plan work and time horizons seem to be three of the strongest reasons for success in Cambridgeshire.</p> <p>LH – Referenced a meeting planned with Kevin Bentley to establish a regional Transport Board. Activity in this board needs to be through leaders as well as portfolio holders.</p> <p>Lewis was thanked for his very interesting presentation, which clearly illustrates strategic planning is now back.</p>	
6.	<p>EPOA - Essex Design Guide – Progress Update and Next Steps</p> <p>PD – Provided an update on the work he is undertaking on behalf of EPOA in refreshing the Essex Design Guide. The previous guide is now 12 years out of date and does not reference some new requirements. In addition to the detailed design principles there will be a focus on social economic issues which will need to be included within the guide.</p> <p>It must be noted that the new guide will move away from being a paperback document, as this will be made into a new web-based document/resource which will enable this to be a live document which can be updated quickly and developed to address new issues. Whilst much of the more detailed urban design principles of the previous EDG hold true, the focus of the new guide is much more strategic and will pick-up on the key changes and gaps that were not there in the last version, hence why it has been necessary to engage with a much wider set of partners and organisations.</p> <p>Over the past few months there have been a number workshops with key partner groups specifically identified to help shape and fashion these new thematic areas including the NHS and Public Health leads, Sports England, digital and smart technology specialist, the Building Research Establishment (BRE), DCLG (design lead) and house builders representatives to develop these new sections within the guide, these being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Design Principles • Health and Wellbeing • Ageing Population • Smart and Digital Technology • Garden Communities <p>There will be at least two follow-ups session for each thematic area and all track changes will be visible to give a flowing story on how the guide has been changed. National guidance that already exists will also be used within the guide to make sure that developers are undertaking the necessary steps. And where existing LPA design guidance is in place this will be cross referenced and accessed in the relevant District sections.</p> <p>In terms of engagement, there is an overall Pan- Essex Steering Group in place which numerous external stakeholders have been invited and contribute to. PD explained he is willing to meet anyone who has further questions or wants to get involved with this work as there is the need to pick up local case studies of best practice to embed into the guide. The Steering</p>	<p>PD is available if further engagement is helpful.</p>

Group has three EPOA representatives overseeing and contributing to this work – Emma, Gordon and Steve.

Taking the document to a web based platform will give the opportunity for easier updates and navigation. It was also mentioned that a copy writer is to be commissioned to put the content together on the website.

There will be the opportunity to test the site, to find what you are looking for should be a three click maximum. The site will be able to work on various platforms such as smartphones and tablets.

PD then took the meeting through a tour of the draft website covering:

- What user are you
- How to guides
- Understanding the context
- Getting the details right
- Development Charter
- Local Authorities and;
- About Us.

Another tab showed a map off Essex with each district visibly outlined with a link back to their own website.

PD – explained there is a Steering Group in which EPOA members sit on. In addition he confirmed that he continues to meet with both the EPOA Policy and DM group to keep them up to date on the work. Uttlesford have been very helpful in offering their digital specialist to help shape/inform the digital and smart thinking required.

AM – confirmed that Thurrock has its own design guide.

The meeting questioned whether residents should be included on the users? The wording of Parish Councils should have residents' forums or something similar.

CB- was keen that the EDG provided SuDS guidance, and reference flooding in relation to Jaywick.

DC – Was keen on the EDG providing guidance on Garden Settlements.

MW – Referred to the fact that design is not fixed and is based on principles, and there is the need to be careful of the language used in the guide, when people are required or advised on certain elements. As a follow up, this is being enforced and approved by EPOA so will a revamp of the EPOA web platform take place? This is something that will need thinking about.

SR – In terms of highways, there is the desire to have shared spaces on surface types, however obtaining planning permission can be difficult if different surfaces require different maintenance arrangements. The point around materials is critical to quality, we need to have materials that are of good quality, durable and easily replaceable.

PD – There will be a PDF with just the content that will accompany the site so that people are able to copy certain paragraphs for other meetings etc.

PD will come back to EPOA for the December meeting to present a nearly finished product.

Further consideration of the EPOA website is needed?

PD to action

	<p>Following discussion, JC was asked whether the model could be used to appraise options before decisions are made. JC confirmed that this is one of the key benefits, as this model will enable comparisons to be made to allow this to happen, and to be able to apply this at the local level.</p> <p>John was thanked for his presentation and EPOA members expressed interest in this work as this progresses.</p>	
9.	<p>Skills Programme Update</p> <p>LH gave an update of the Anglia Ruskin Planning Training Programme which will start a little later than planned in November. This slight delay has occurred due to internal issues within ARU.</p> <p>The first workshop, “Applying best practice to local plans and planning policy”, will take place on 22nd November. The second on the 29th November and so on.</p> <p>The third item, “Planning for Garden Towns and Urban Extensions”, will be an all-day event. Therefore EPOA were asked for a volunteer for a venue. It was agreed that Chelmsford City Council will host this with a focus on Beaulieu Park.</p>	
10.	<p>AOB: Viability Protocol</p> <p>DC – Introduced development viability as an issue EPOA needs to address. She explained that for the last three sites she has been dealing with there has been no affordable housing, based on the argument of viability and questioned whether this was occurring elsewhere, and if so what can be done?</p> <p>It was clear from the discussion that development viability is a very hot topic for all authorities, and different independent agencies are appraising submitted material on behalf of the LPAs’ which includes the District Valuer. It was clear from the discussion that the current help on offer is perhaps not best placed to support LPA as this feels less than satisfactory and the infrastructure deficit is simply growing.</p> <p>It was recognised this problem is widespread and the London Borough Councils back in November 2016 adopted a Viability Protocol which has led to further work and the Mayor of London further strengthening the Councils negotiating position when faced with such viability challenges.</p> <p>It was agreed that an EPOA Viability Protocol be added as an agenda item at the December meeting. GT also mentioned that he is currently recruiting a Development and Viability officer.</p> <p>Update Note - following the EPOA meeting a task and finish group has been established and discussions are currently underway to share this work with both the EPOA Policy and DM groups prior to tabling an item on 7 December.</p>	<p>Bring back to the next EPOA meeting</p>
	<p>Next Meetings: December 7th 2017 – Discovery Centre March 22nd 2018 – Discovery Centre</p>	