

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION
UPDATE ON PROGRESS IN RESPECT OF INSPECTOR'S ACTIONS

24 APRIL 2020

Dear Mrs Phillips

Re: Epping Forest District Local Plan (2011-2033) Examination

1. The Council writes further to our letter of 21 January (ED104) to provide an update on our progress in completing the Actions that you outlined following the conclusion of Examination Hearings last summer (ED98) and thus our progress towards Main Modifications (MMs) consultation.

Revised programme

2. Before providing details on the Council's progress, we would like to make reference to the unprecedented times that we are all currently facing in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. Outlined below is our best estimate, at this time, of the impact that this may have upon the work programme, but as you will appreciate there is inherent uncertainty. We would also like to advise that the Council's work programme, which we had both previously acknowledged as challenging, is facing some slippage.
3. The Council understands that the Planning Inspectorate's advice is that Inspectors will continue, where possible, to progress the pre and post-hearing stages of Examinations but that it is inevitable that the progress of some Examinations will be delayed. We are pleased to understand this, and the Council's position is similar; we are committed to progressing all post-hearing work and moving towards the MMs consultation as soon as is feasibly possible. We must however note, that whilst the Council is well-prepared to continue this work (in terms of ability to work remotely and use of technology to communicate etc), the reality is that we will face capacity challenges with staff (e.g. in terms of childcare responsibilities) and similarly so will our consultants. In addition, we are conscious that some of the Council's Planning Policy staff may well be redeployed in the coming weeks into community-facing roles to help manage the impact of the COVID-19 locally. This may further affect the programme, but please be assured that we will do all we can to minimise this.
4. Below is our current best estimate as to the revised key milestones required to reach the MM Consultation stage. It will be helpful to note that we are still finalising

capacities on some of the sites in order to finalise the housing trajectory which is required to feed into the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) and this is therefore shifting the timescale by which the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) in particular can be conducted. The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and SA of the MMs are now due for completion in August 2020. Work is continuing to progress the mitigation strategy including discussions with Natural England and the Conservators of Epping Forest with a view to adopting an interim strategy prior to the MMs consultation.

5. We are grateful for your practical approach in considering draft work as it is done in order to ensure efficiency in finalising the MM Schedule. Although timescales have moved out and we can no longer provide a third and final submission of MMs in early June we still think will be able to report on a good number of Actions/MMs by this date. We therefore propose retaining the existing tranche 3 deadline but to also add a fourth and final submission deadline in early September to report on all remaining Actions, drafted MMs, the SA and the HRA. On this basis, we therefore anticipate public consultation on the MMs from October 2020.

Update on progress

6. We continue to make strong progress with the actions in relation to the updated HRA and the preparation of a mitigation strategy to address the impact on air quality for Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation building upon the work outlined in our January update. As you are aware and despite some delay, we have finalised the methodology review for the HRA and this is now on the Examination website (ED105). Work is progressing on modelling the scenarios and identifying the necessary mitigation measures. We have meetings scheduled between the Council, Natural England and the Conservators of Epping Forest and to discuss the outputs and proposed mitigation to inform the MMs.
7. In respect of non-HRA actions, we trust that receiving a significant tranche of Actions/MMs will have assured of our progress in these matters.
8. In terms of Action 6 regarding Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) it might be helpful to note that the Draft Green Infrastructure Strategy was approved for public consultation at the Council's Cabinet on 15 April 2020. We are currently considering the consultation programme on the Draft Strategy in the light of the COVID-19 situation and are currently targeting for this to commence in June.
9. We hope that you find this update helpful and if you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me. We would be grateful for your feedback on the outlined

revisions to the programme. Finally, please be assured that we will provide further updates at regular intervals, particularly in light of the potential challenges that might be faced as the COVID-19 situation develops.

Yours sincerely

Alison Blom-Cooper