

Essex Development Management Forum

Date: 18 July 2014

Time: 10am

*Venue: Chelmsford Museum,
Oaklands Park*

Attendance List:

Nigel Richardson (Chair & Minute Taker)	Epping Forest District Council
Richard Greaves	Essex County Council
Sarah Hill-Saunders	Chelmsford Borough Council
John Whitlock	Rochford District Council
Tessa Lambert	Braintree District Council
Andrew Tyrrell	Colchester Borough Council
Derek Walker	Tendring District Council
David Lewis	Basildon District Council
Jonathan Keen	Thurrock Borough Council
Kim Fisher	Castle Point Borough Council
Nigel Brown	Uttlesford District Council
Mark Lawrence	ECC Highways
Caroline McCaffrey	Brentwood

Guest speakers:

David Payne Mineral Products Association

1. Apologies for Absence

Chris Purvis – Maldon

Elizabeth Fitzgerald – Harlow

Phil McIntosh – Southend-on-Sea

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 May 2014 were agreed as accurate.

3. Matters arising

None

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

4. Value and Need For Minerals in Essex (David Payne – Snr Planning Advisor at Mineral Products Association)

DP provided a presentation on why minerals matter. Reserves falling due to change in construction methods, but sales of sand and gravel (in London, limestone rather than gravel) has increased since 2012-13. Landbanks (permitted reserves) should be a minimum of 7

years, Essex currently 9.7 years and therefore reasonably healthy. There is no national figure for aggregate supply and only recently that County Council's are producing Local Aggregate Assessments. Challenge for the industry is recovery of lost capacity. Issues for local authorities is recognise need for and uses of minerals, safeguarding policy for allocation in their Local Plan, sustainability of local supply versus long distance imports and recognise the benefits of local supply of minerals. Each mineral planning authority is required to produce a mineral plan and Essex has done so, up to 2030.

5. Recruitment Difficulties/Workload

General consensus that planning application submissions are up on last year and vacant planning posts is proving difficult to fill with suitable candidates. Some Council's struggling with approval to even recruit, whilst others have budget for consultants as and when needed.

RG stated Essex had put planner job in Planning Magazine but of the 10 who applied, none were suitable. Had turned instead to agency – Capita.

NR – even Agency Planners are scarce at present and expect a £30 per hour rate for a limited experienced planning officer.

DL – Basildon appear to be holding on to Planners through more competitive salaries.

AT – Have details of previous now retired officer who may be willing to work. Will circulate.

For future, wonder if there was some secondment opportunities or recruitment swap/share of officers, although it appears that peaks and troughs are generally the same across authorities. Perhaps take up at EPOA and look at possible strategy on why working for local government planning, particularly in Essex, is a good career grounding. **NR to raise at next EPOA meeting.**

6. Justify Inappropriate Development in the Green Belt – Viability Argument

NR explained that Epping Forest have received applications for special-needs school with enabling residential development in the green belt. Wondered if other Essex authorities have similar examples of assessing viability need for housing supply/nos. to justify developing a school. Concern raised that school itself is not an appropriate development and whilst may be the first school for autistic children in Essex, this is not in itself a case for very special circumstances.

DL had a case that may be helpful and would send on. (Appeal decision attached)

7. Too Many Conditions attached to Planning Permissions?

AT raised this following attendance at Planning Officer Society meeting at Tower Hamlets where the issue of too many onerous planning conditions was raised. Developers have been suggesting that whilst the NPPF may have encouraged more planning permissions to be granted, it is the onerous conditions and 'red tape' attached to these permissions that is now proving to be the delaying factor in more house-building coming forward.

NB stated that Uttlesford had done a cull on conditions and in the case of Outline permissions, just has a reserved matter condition in most cases. Formal application to discharge conditions has resulted in more work for LPA's and with limited resources they are not a priority compared with planning applications/appeals etc.

There was a discussion over whether too many conditions are pre-commencement when they could be "prior to occupation" and therefore not hold back the take up of the planning permission/ start of development. It was also stated that developers are being too cautious and not providing information up front at planning application stage, hence the imposition of more conditions.

8. Prior Approvals – Experience so far

Brief discussion, particularly on prior approval change of use from agriculture to residential in respect of what is the planning unit.

SH-S provided hard copy of two decisions that Chelmsford had made on such applications and which have a note stating what "curtilage" means.

9. Planning News

Further CLG consultations due out. General apathy whether to respond as views do not appear to be taken into consideration.

Announcement that LPA's be "required" to put local development orders on brownfield sites that specify certain kinds of development that receive planning permission in advance. £5m fund put aside to help council's to create the first 100 LDO's. Up to now, only been used to encourage commercial and industrial development on business parks. Consultation to follow.

10. Interesting Appeal Decisions

DL brought to the Forum's attention an appeal decision from Basildon – Bowers Gifford appeal. 750 dwellings in the green belt, dismissed, despite Basildon's 5 year land supply being about 3 and half years short. Decision attached.

11. EPOA

Minutes were attached. EPOA had suggested this Forum look at Planning Compacts.

12. AOB

ML – ECC loss of 7 staff members recently, review by Christmas of service, where maybe changes to officers and areas, but are shortly advertising for 2 posts.

13. Items for next Agenda

Planning Compact:- Dominic Collins – Head of Commissioning Growing Essex Future Development

14. Date, time and venue of next meeting

Friday 24 October 2014, Chelmsford Museum, Oaklands Park 10am.

Actions List

- NR to arrange for Dominic Collins to attend next meeting
- AT – Circulate details of former Planners