

**ESSEX PLANNING OFFICERS ASSOCIATION****Minutes of meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017**  
**At Discovery Centre – Braintree**

<p><b>PRESENT:</b>  Graham Thomas – ECC (Chair)  Richard Hatter – Thurrock  Natalie Hayward – Rochford  Karen Syrett – Colchester  Matthew Winslow – Basildon  Dianne Cooper – Harlow  Richard Greaves – ECC  Phil Drane – Brentwood  Nigel Richardson – Epping Forest  David Green – Chelmsford  Gordon Glenday – Uttlesford  Kim Fisher-Bright – Castle Point  Matt Leigh - Maldon District Council</p>	<p>Sam Graves – ECC (Minutes)</p> <p><b>Guests:</b>  Charlene Clear – BRE Building Research Establishment  Peter Dawson – Place Services  Alethea Evans – Place Services  John Cuthbertson – ECC  Finn Williams – Public Practice  Jorn Peters – GLA  Paul Dodson – ECC</p>
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No.	Agenda item	Action
1.	<p><b>Introduction &amp; Apologies:</b></p> <p>Introductions were made. GT welcomed Paul Dodson who will shortly be taking up the Planning Directors post at Maldon. The following apologies noted.</p> <p>Emma Goodings – Braintree  Ian Vipond – Colchester  Amanda Parrott – Basildon  Matthew Thomas – Rochford  Andy Millard – Thurrock  Peter Geraghty – Southend  John Hayden - Braintree</p>	
2.	<p><b>Minutes and Actions from Previous Meeting 7<sup>th</sup> September</b>  Agreed as an accurate record and to be –placed on EPOA website</p> <p>Actions are as follows:</p> <p><b>Recruitment and Retention</b> - being presented on today by RH.</p> <p><b>GTAA</b> - Graham Holmes from Uttlesford who was leading this work for EPOA has now left. It was confirmed that Stephen Miles will now lead this work on behalf of all the EPOA authorities.</p> <p>At the recent EPOA Policy Forum Amanda set a deadline for last Friday, for comments to be fed back on the individual chapters of the reports. The composite GTAA report is understood to be largely completed; with the transit site requirement the only substantive outstanding issue. The summary in the main report require further refinement and the timetable and programme for the outstanding transit site is still to</p>	<b>SG</b>

	<p>be determined.</p> <p>The transit site requirements for the area will be a separate piece of work, which will need to be properly planned for through specific Local Plan site allocations.</p> <p>In relation to the Essex Design Guide/and Homes Quality Mark (HQM) this is on the agenda for today's discussion, with presentations by JC, PD and CC.</p> <p>Viability Protocol – since the last EPOA Planning portfolios meeting since the last EPOA, a draft is ready for today's meeting.</p>	
<p><b>3.</b></p>	<p><b>Notice of AOB:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• G &amp; T Housing protocol – MW</li> <li>• Recent announcement on Government funding opportunities</li> <li>• Discussion from policy forum – should EPOA respond jointly to the London Plan?</li> <li>• Brownfield Registers – NR</li> </ul>	
<p><b>4.</b></p>	<p><b>Recruitment and Retention</b></p> <p>Richard Greaves who leads the EPOA recruitment and retention sub-group is also our representative on the East of England group that has been set up to help address what is a critical risk to the LPAs' in being able to deliver the planning services required. He gave an update on some of the key issues and actions the sub-group are currently engaged with.</p> <p>He reported that a regional survey was undertaken by the Local Government Association to understand the nature and scale of the problem. This work concluded that within the East of England there is a lack of town planning capacity, there is an ageing workforce within the public sector, with a high turnover and retention is increasing becoming difficult. This work found there is particularly lack of experienced principal/senior planners working for local authorities, as these very experienced planners are very valuable for private consultancies. This work also found that the quality of the recruitment processes of local authorities is also a barrier to recruiting new staff, as this is often clunky and time consuming, in what is difficult fast moving employment market.</p> <p>Within the Essex family of local authorities a survey was undertaken of which 13 LPAs' responded. This identified 70 town planner vacancies within the Essex local authorities and of these, 30 posts were for the more experienced senior roles. There is a considerable reliance on consultancy planners undertaking work throughout Essex, although only 1 of the 13 LPAs gave a positive review of agency workers. Consultancy planners/agency workers are costing the local authorities between £600k and £1mn per year. In addition 52 young planning officers chose to leave within in their first year of work for an LPA to seek progression and opportunities elsewhere. The aging workforce within Essex is equally a serious problem, there will be 31 experienced planners currently working, who will retire within the next 5 years.</p> <p>In terms of regional and national solutions, the technical apprenticeship opportunity as being applied by some local authorities including Havering Borough Council which is the closest authority, illustrates lessons that could be learnt. The RTPi training offer is currently out to consultation and likely to move forward with a part time 5 year planning training course which both Herts and Suffolk are seriously looking at. This option is helpful but does not address the current officer shortfall and the need to respond to increase in work.</p>	<p><b>RG</b></p>

Schools packs are “in design” to sell the profession to young people, to seek to counteract the negative press which has had a serious impact of deterring young people apply to universities for what is a vital growth and development profession. We need work hard to sell the profession and message that without good planners and good planning, how will we be able to properly Plan for and grow the housing and economy, both of which require a ready supply of new sites in the right places.

A Memorandum of Cooperation has been signed by all of the East of England LPAs’. By working together at a regional level this will help drive the work forward. It is understood all 15 Essex authorities have signed-their MoU.

**How do we retain planning staff?**

Invest in Learning and Development tends to suffer as one of the first casualties when budgets are cut back, this is a false saving and something that needs to be looked at. Flexible structures, seeing what we can offer in terms of a career path for a planner and an opportunity to looking at moving between LPAs is also to be investigated. And relook at employee engagement, how we market ourselves.

The recommendations were to strengthen employment engagement, growing our own, and keeping through providing career progression and development opportunities. The next steps for the EPOA Task and Finish group is to knit all of the recommendations together.

How do we get to learning institutions to make planning an appealing career choice? How do we progress, working together as LPAs in Essex, or on smaller geographies, to offer an attractive employment opportunity? Do need to share best practice around what a scheme should cover.

The scale of the recruitment and retention problem is sever and will only get worse. There needs an action plan, what are the interventions that can be actioned and what can we achieve quickly. The EPOA Task and Finish Group need to come up with some delivery and direction of travel. Suggest RG takes this back to the group. Retaining is also important.

**RG**

**Fin Williams from Public Practice presented to EPOA**

Net spending in LPA’s has halved. Nearly all London Boroughs now needs place shaping skills. The primary barrier is funding to finding and keeping the right people.

Public Practice, independent social enterprise. There are three core pillars, shaping better places, building planning capacity and changing perceptions of planners. Public Practice is associates going to authorities to work 90% of their time the other 10% will be invested in research. Local authorities pay 4k per placement charge and the associated supplied generally get paid 30-50k. At the moment this work is cross subsidised by 6 supporting organisations who give charitable funding, and the first two years has been confirmed.

Recruiting for the required consultants is underway and the programme is due to start in April. Deadline for expression of interest for support from Public practice is 11th December but can be extended. EPOA colleagues were advised to follow-up directly with Finn. For the first round of support only 20 projects will be able to be supported in the current round of bidding.

**All**

It was felt the support able to be provided would be 55% cheaper on average than the

	<p>current market price of engaging planning agency worker. One of the aims is to embed the Public Practice employees permanently within the public sector.</p> <p>MW – What do you see this looking like in the future? Looking at DCLG who are supportive of this, scaling in terms of numbers we are also looking at other geographies including the midland and Scotland for example. This business model is likely to expand and grow as an alternative the planning consultants and agency workers.</p>	
5.	<p><b>EPOA – Essex Design Guide Update &amp; Homes Quality Mark Update</b></p> <p>John Cuthbertson and Peter Dawson from Place Services presented the update on the EPOA’s Essex Design Guide, whilst Charlene Clear from the Building Research Establishment (BRE) gave a presentation on the Homes Quality Mark (HQM) currently being explored in relation to the Quality Charter.</p> <p>It was reported that progress on the EDG – has reached the stage the draft content has now been completed by all the thematic working groups. A copywriter has been employed to review the content to ensure this reads as a document that fits a website format. It is not a document like past EDG documents and hence it would look and feel different. It was confirmed that good progress has been made on the attendees, speakers and agenda for launch event to be held on 28 February.</p> <p>Key updates in the new EDG include: sections on SuDS, Highways and Garden Communities. Updates have been provided on Streets &amp; Roads, Landscape, Layout, Architectural and Internal Design. And new design principles on Active Design, and Ageing Population, Health and Wellbeing &amp; Digital and Smart Technology embedded throughout.</p> <p>This review of the EDG has by necessity drawn on new subject matter experts from the Public and Private sector to consider new themes, review existing context and provide new contributions to strengthen the Essex Design Guide. This has been undertaken through workshops, feedback opportunities, an EDG Steering Group as well as various presentations to multiple groups. We have drawn on the subject matter expertise from BRE, digital and smart technology leads, the NHS and public health expertise in relation to health and wellbeing and Sports England in relation to active design.</p> <p>PD walked EPOA colleagues through each of the new thematic areas. He also explained that given the existing guide is 12 years out of date, this has also needed to be updated to national policies.</p> <p>JC took EPOA colleagues through the live engagement exercise underway which will run from the 29th November to the 20<sup>th</sup> December. This engagement exercise was requested by the EPOA Steering Group. There will be 2 live engagement sessions, one planned in Colchester for a North Essex session and a South Essex session will take place in Castle Point. Prior to these sessions a feedback survey will be circulated to aid the sessions.</p> <p>The launch of the EDG will take place as an event in London on the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> February. JC asked EPOA for a volunteer to be a ‘talking head’ for a short promotional video to be used at the launch, to which Basildon volunteered. JC then presented the EDG website which is still in a draft format.</p> <p>It was confirmed an additional EPOA has be scheduled for the 25<sup>th</sup> of January to go</p>	<p>MW</p> <p>GT</p>

	<p>through the details of the new EDG.</p> <p><b>Charlene Clear from BRE introduced the HQM.</b></p> <p>The HQM is an assessment and certification scheme for new homes and is a tool for both home buyers and developers. Consumer research uncovered that most people buy homes ‘Heart over Head’. The HQM will provide a 1 to 5 star rating. CC explained 1 in 5 people would pay more to buy a HQM rated home and 75% would pay £750 or more per home for certification, of this 13% would pay £3000.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home – A home is more than 4 walls and a roof, it is about hearts and minds</li> <li>• Quality – Everybody wants quality, but doesn’t always know what it is</li> <li>• Mark – Provides reassurance, independence, backed by science</li> </ul> <p>The challenges that the HQM is addressing are; running costs, environmental impact and health and wellbeing. The 1 star rated home is better than the current building regulations and goes up to 5 stars.</p> <p>BRE have been working with the EPOA team producing the new EDG and have made sure that the HQM relates to the work currently being undertaken in refreshing the EDG. The HQM looks at Accessibility, Access and Space, Daylighting IP Acoustics Transport Ventilation, Digital &amp; Smart Technologies and Smart Homes and so on. The HQM is currently being updated.</p>	<b>SG</b>
<b>6.</b>	<p><b>EPOA Viability Protocol</b></p> <p>Alethea Evans from Place Services presented this item to EPOA.</p> <p>The Viability Protocol aims to provide a standardised residual value viability model and some helpful guidance. This is needed to better balance the viability discussions which are all too often being promoted as a means to argue against providing policy compliant planning applications which is then placing a cost burden on the public purse or generating a further infrastructure deficit. This Protocol based on the existing London Borough Viability Protocol will help redress the current imbalance to help secure infrastructure and affordable housing at appropriate levels.</p> <p>The Viability Protocol will also support the work EPOA are doing to produce a Planning Protocol which is being prepared with the Essex Developers Group.</p> <p>The draft protocol is based on London example and an EPOA Steering Group is operational. Draft versions of the document have been circulated to both the EPOA Policy and DM forums, and a presentation was given to Policy forum.</p> <p>Following a helpful discussion the following actions were agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review EFDC Viability document- revise EPOA Protocol as necessary</li> <li>• Consider Harlow examples of developer profit levels and legal advice</li> <li>• Carry out engagement with DM Forum (throughout Jan)</li> <li>• Finalise document ready for approval at EPOA at the March meeting</li> <li>• Consider SPD- develop a project plan and costings for GT to approve. Costings will need to include finalisation of Protocol as set out above</li> <li>• EPOA to make a decision on the need for the Viability Protocol SPD – March.</li> </ul>	<b>AE</b>  <b>All</b>
<b>7.</b>	<p><b>London Plan Consultation</b></p> <p>Jorn Peters from GLA presented this item to EPOA</p>	

	<p>The draft London Plan has been prepared and was published for public consultation on 1<sup>st</sup> December.</p> <p>Is a different document because it is more visual and engaging, the wording is more direct to avoid the repetition. It is promoting “good growth” and promoting the change of the town centres. London is facing significant growth and requires the efficient use of our land which will mean stronger co-locations and mixed uses. The Plan is Based on a strong focus on a design lead approach, making sure quality of life is not affected.</p> <p>Creating a healthy City – promoting transport strategy. 65,000 homes a year can be accommodated against the need figure of 66,000 homes. This will address the first 10 years of the Plan beyond this, it is less clear.</p> <p>Growing a good economy – strong protection for industrial land, losing more than we can afford in London. New policy on digital infrastructure, happy to exchange best practice on this. Increasing efficiency and resilience – flood risk issues, fire safety etc.</p> <p>The London Plan has a Key diagram: Looking at connections between the opportunity areas. There are 9 new opportunity areas. Looking at the Elizabeth line going East. Looking at in detail the migration flows on the basis of cooperation. Commuting has increased significantly since 2001.</p> <p>Initial Strategic Infrastructure Priorities outside of London – about promoting and delivering.</p> <p>SD3 Growth Locations – in terms of collaboration we need to explore with partners the opportunities for investment to delivery growth. There are a range of issues we can collaborate on. With better evidence, we can demonstrate better.</p> <p>London Plan consultation timetable is 1st December to 2nd March 2018.</p> <p>EPOA asked what the expectation is beyond the 10 year target. JP will go back to colleagues on this and report back.</p> <p>EPOA asked how London will deal with the deliverability of homes. 270,000 are in the pipeline. They are working with partners in the south east and looking for solutions, a viability team is there addressing this issue in terms of planning. A housing strategy will look more at what is being permitted. Making sure the infrastructure is there to unlock development.</p>	<p>JP</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p><b>Recreational Avoidance Mitigation Strategy</b></p> <p>Driven by Natural England, there is a need to carry out a RAMS strategy for a large geographic area. This aims to determine level of impact and what the financial contributions are for housing developments and RAMS will define how they will be spent. Epping, Harlow and Uttlesford are excluded as they are not near the coast.</p> <p>A meeting on the 9th November with Natural England this revealed that that 11 LPAs needed to be involved and the RAMS strategy. 10 of the 11 agreed that Place services are to deliver this.</p> <p>Drafting of the Memorandum of Understanding and preparation of the project plan and brief was prepared at the end of September. Steering Group meetings with Chelmsford and discussion with Colchester to hold workshops are now planned to get</p>	

	<p>all who need to be involved.</p> <p>The first Steering Group will take place on 14th December. There however a need to get Maldon on board. There is not a “no-cost solution” although getting this work done is likely to be more cost effective than trying to do something on an individual basis. The Duty to Cooperate aspect needs to be carefully looked at. The difference of opinion with Maldon has now been escalated and GT as the EPOA chair has been asked to get involved directly with Maldon. May need a member broker or raise at members meeting. Maldon to make a decision by the 14th December.</p> <p><b>Update Note</b> – this matter has now been resolved all 11 local authorities are now collectively pursuing the required RAMS work. This has also been submitted for a MHCLG funding bid by Colchester on behalf of all 11 local authorities.</p>	
<p>9.</p>	<p><b>EPOA Planning Protocol</b></p> <p>Aimed at building relationships between LPA’s and developers Kent adopted a Planning Protocol in 2016. Work has started with establishing an EPOA sub group and contacting the Essex Developers Group. Colchester, Chelmsford and Epping are the EPOA leads for this with Place Service commissioned to produce the work working on this. This will be owned by the EPOA DM group to be brought forward to the main EPOA meeting for adoption – March meeting if possible.</p> <p>There is the need to work up project plan. Engagement must take place with the DM sub group and developers group in Jan/Feb. Protocol to be completed and supported by partners by end of March- this is a significant challenge.</p>	<p>AE</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>Matt Winslow explained that the G&amp;T – specialist accommodation issue, cannot rely or use the recently adopted EPOA Guidance Note: Mechanism for the Consideration of Unmet Housing Need. To address the G&amp;T issue will require its own bespoke Guidance Note.</p> <p>The EPOA colleagues agreed with this request and asked for Basildon and Chelmsford, to lead a bespoke G&amp;T Guidance note. In addition to Basildon, it was agreed that the task and finish group comprise of Basildon, Harlow, Tendring, Chelmsford and Colchester.</p> <p>The EPOA Health Impact Assessment Guide (2008) needs to be refreshed. Wanted to let EPOA know if we are in acceptance and agreement, this is a yes. This has fed into the design guide, but this is a separate piece of work. Laura- Taylor Green (Public Health) is currently reviewing the 2008 HIA guidance adopted by EPOA</p> <p>A question of who has met the deadline for the register, part 1 for 31st December. Most have completed this. Took around 2 weeks’ worth of work depending on the nature of the LPA.</p> <p>New Governments Planning funding – it was agreed by EPOA that as a principle we support the different funding bids where possible. There was also a willingness to submit EPOA supported areas of work including the RAMS and other such work.</p> <p>GT asked to be kept informed of bids and to provide feedback on the overall EPOA funding picture.</p>	<p>MW to lead</p> <p>All</p>
	<p><b>EPOA Dates for 2018:</b></p> <p>Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January 10:00-13:00</p> <p>Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 10:00-13:00</p>	

