

MINUTES
of the
CHELMSFORD POLICY BOARD
held on 13 March 2025 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor C. Adutwim (Chair)

Councillors P. Clark, K. Franks, J. Hawkins, J. Jeapes, R. Lee, G. Pooley, A. Sosin and S. Young

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Deakin, Fuller, Massey, Walsh and Whitehead. Cllrs Franks, Hawkins and Lee substituted for Cllrs Deakin, Fuller and Walsh.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded that they must disclose any interests they knew they had in items of business on the meeting's agenda and that they must do so at this point on the agenda or as soon as they became aware of the interest. If the interest was a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest they were also obliged to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the meeting. Any declarations are recorded in the relevant minute below.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 16th January 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. Public Questions

No public questions had been submitted for the meeting.

5. Updated Essex Parking Standards Guidance

The Board were asked to consider the updated Essex Parking Guidance and Standards commissioned by the Essex Planning Officers' Association (EPOA) and to refer them to Cabinet for approval. The Board were informed that the current standards had been produced in 2009 and were therefore in need of an update. It was noted that officers from all Council's in Essex had been involved in the production of the updated document, alongside public and stakeholder consultation in 2024 by Essex County Council. The Board noted that the guidance related to parking provision and design for new developments and the consideration of planning applications. The Board heard that Part 1 of the updated guidance and standards related to general design and the number of parking spaces for new development, whilst Part 2 supplemented this with further guidance for garden communities and large scale developments.

The Board were informed by officers that the previous standards had been based on maximum standards, but the updated document focused on minimum standards, allowing for higher levels of parking provision where required. The Board also heard that the Council would use the updated document as a starting point when considering planning applications, but that the Planning Committee would still have flexibility where required. It was noted that the document did not relate to public car parks and that it looked at connectivity levels of different areas, when determining the amount of parking provision required. The Board were also informed that the zonal approach to locations, could change as and when public transport services were added to new phases of developments. The Board noted that update guidance provided a more common sense approach to parking standards, encouraging provision to be lower where suitable public transport was in place. The Board also noted that the standards and guidance provided a consistent baseline for decision makers, whilst still enabling a departure when warranted by specific local circumstances.

In response to questions from the Board, officers stated that;

- The zonal connectivity elements would be looked at periodically to ensure they were in line with current public transport provision and the Planning committee could always use flexibility and local knowledge where appropriate.
- The levels of provision would be based upon certain triggers being met at new developments.
- Significant new developments would only be in sustainable locations or locations made by sustainable by new public transport provision, so concerns around developments being overly reliant on car journeys should not materialise, but in any event the updated guidance showed a minimum of 3 spaces in some more rural areas compared to the current 2.
- The Council's Car Parking strategy looked at provision in public car parks and sought the correct mix of parking in areas such as the City Centre, rather than the updated standards and guidance.
- The guidance did not overlap directly with policies such as those on conservation areas or heritage, but the Council's heritage officer would always be able to provide relevant responses where required to planning applications.
- E-scooters were only permitted under the current pilot scheme, but part 2 of the updated guidance did refer to mobility hubs with parking provided for E-scooters in more communal locations.

RESOLVED that the Board recommended that Cabinet approve the use of the updated Essex Parking Guidance and Standards Parts 1 and 2 in the consideration of development proposals and planning applications in accordance with Policy DM27 of the adopted Chelmsford Local Plan (2020) and its emerging review.

(7.03pm to 7.36pm)

6. North Hill, Little Baddow Conservation Area

The Board were asked to consider the North Hill, Little Baddow Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan and whether it should be published for consultation. The Board were informed that following a request from Little Baddow Parish Council the Character Appraisal and Management Plan for the area had been produced and that following a public consultation, a future report would be prepared for Cabinet to ratify the designation of the Conservation Area.

The Board were informed that a study of the area had identified sufficient special interest to justify the designation, hence the Board's approval was being sought to progress with public consultation. The Board heard that an area needed to be of 'special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' and that officers felt the area met that requirement. It was noted that there were currently 25 Conservation areas within Chelmsford and that North Hill had many key characteristics including a high standard of maintenance, views across the valley and modest buildings within a landscape setting. The Board heard that the character appraisal and boundary would be amended if required following the public consultation, before approval by Cabinet and then finally Statutory notifications.

In response to questions from the Board, officers stated that;

- Conservation Areas were intended to assist with managing change in areas where historic character should be protected, not to restrict development and that the designation was different to the green belt, where permitted development rights remained and in effect it placed greater scrutiny over any change, to ensure it was sympathetic to the special characteristics of the area. It was also noted that some Conservation Areas existed within the green belt and that they were a qualitative designation with a fairly high bar that had to be reached to achieve designation.
- The area in question had a significant number of historic heritage assets in close vicinity to each other and warranted an extra layer of protection, but that did not mean no development would be able to take place, just that there would be a tighter control to reflect the very special character of the location.
- Conservation Areas were reviewed by officers on an ad hoc basis and may be looked at due to requests by a Parish Tier Council as in this instance or as a result of nearby development pressure.
- They would explore whether a more formal review policy position was required going forward for existing or new Conservation Areas.

RESOLVED that;

1. The Board approved the publication of the North Hill, Little Baddow Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for consultation.
2. The Board delegated responsibility to the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford to make any minor changes required to the document prior to publication for consultation.

(7.39pm to 7.52pm)

7. Feedback from the Waterways Working Group

The Board were provided with an update from the Chair of the Waterways Working Group, that detailed feedback from the meeting held on 29th January 2025. The Board heard that Chelmsford had two fantastic rivers, but that flood defences were crucial in protecting the City alongside planning guidelines, from increased flooding as a result of climate change. It was noted that the Environment Agency had been looking into possible solutions to defend the City Centre from flooding and it was felt that a larger amount of smaller schemes would be the preferred approach, rather than one large scheme. The Board heard that the EA had undertaken a very comprehensive survey of the flood risks in Chelmsford and modelling based upon that would be finalised soon. Then suggestions could be looked at along with costs and a business case for suitable options going forward.

In response to questions from the Board, it was noted that;

- The flood resilience scheme aimed to tackle properties that were at risk of flooding with a main focus on the City Centre and that the risks from the River Crouch were different.
- A different solution would be required for areas outside of the City Centre, which would be driven by the number of properties at risk.
- The EA had carried out the most extensive survey for the City Centre to date and had looked at the increased chances of flooding in certain areas. The updated modelling accounted for new nationally set criteria to look at climate change and the scheme would look at a worst case scenario and a balance for how acceptable and appropriate a prevention scheme might be.
- Officers had encouraged the EA to continue dialogue with owners of certain properties to provide reassurance and noted that nothing would be proposed for the City Centre, that would have an adverse impact elsewhere.

RESOLVED that the updated be noted.

(7.53pm to 8.06pm)

8. Work Programme

The Board considered an item detailing their future work programme.

RESOLVED that the Work programme be approved.

(8.06pm to 8.07pm)

9. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.07pm

Chair