

MINUTES
of the
CHELMSFORD POLICY BOARD
held on 26 May 2022 at 7:00pm

Present:

Councillor I Fuller (Chair)

Councillors H Ayres, D Clark, N Gulliver, R Massey, G H J Pooley,
R J Poulter, A Sosin, M Steel, A Thorpe-Apps, N Walsh and T N Willis

Also present: Councillor M J Mackrory

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors J Galley, G B R Knight and R T Whitehead. Councillors Galley and Whitehead had appointed Councillors A Thorpe-Apps and M Steel respectively as their substitutes.

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. Appointment of Vice Chair

RESOLVED that Councillor A B Sosin be appointed as the Vice Chair of the Policy Board for 2022/23.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 3 March 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

5. Public Questions

Five members of the public had submitted statements and questions expressing concern about the impact on Chelmsford of National Grid's East Anglia Green Energy Enablement (GREEN) project for a new high voltage network reinforcement between Norwich, Bramford and Tilbury. One person attended the meeting to put their question in person. As well as advocating alternative options for the provision of the network, the questioners generally asked that the Council make clear its opposition to the proposal in its own response to National Grid's consultation.

The Board was informed that National Grid was carrying out a non-statutory consultation on the route for the network reinforcement scheme which was due to end on 16 June 2022. Officers were still assessing the implications of the proposal for Chelmsford and would be preparing a formal response to the consultation. It would be preferable if that response could be considered by members before it was sent and National Grid had been asked whether it would accept this Council's response if it was submitted after the deadline. A reply was awaited. If it was allowed, officers would refer it to a member body, possibly the Policy Board, if time permitted.

In response to a question from the Board, officers said that they were liaising with other local authorities in the region affected by the proposal. Each area would have different considerations and concerns and therefore would submit their own responses to the consultation, rather than agreeing a joint response. The areas of common opinion would emerge once those responses had been submitted.

The Board noted the questions and statements from the public and agreed that those who submitted them should be encouraged to make their views known to National Grid through the formal consultation.

(7.02pm to 7.23pm)

6. Longfield Solar Farm Development Consent Order – Consultation Response and Draft Local Impact Report

The Policy Board was informed that the Development Consent Order for the Longfield Solar Farm had been accepted by the Planning Inspectorate for examination and the process for determining it had started. Interested parties, including the public, had been invited to submit relevant representations on the proposal at this stage. The City Council and other statutory parties would be invited to submit Local Impact Reports (LIRs) at a later stage. The LIRs would be taken into account by the Secretary of State in deciding whether to make the Development Consent Order.

Officers has prepared a draft LIR for the Board's consideration, together with a short representation in response to the current consultation to highlight the main issues that would be contained in the LIR.

The relevant representation and the draft LIR highlighted the impact the proposal would have on landscape character and amenity; the loss of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land; the need for full consideration of the impact of the proposal upon ecology and the natural landscape; and the change in residential living environment. The Council would also expect consideration to be given to other issues, including cultural heritage, noise, vibration, air quality and contamination, traffic and highway safety, flooding and drainage and human health and battery safety.

The Policy Board endorsed the suggested relevant representation and draft LIR. During its discussion, it was informed that Generals Lane was envisaged as the main access to the site during the construction period. It would be preferable if access to Generals Lane was from the A12 but that would be dependent on other works being completed before the development, if approved, started. The applicant would need to address all road traffic management issues before construction work started. The Board was also told that the City Council, Braintree District Council and Essex County Council would be responsible for ensuring that most of the conditions attached to any Development Consent Order were discharged and adhered to. Officers of each authority were looking at how to ensure that. It was also pointed out that a Community Liaison Group of local residents and other parties had been established and the local authorities would look to work with that on monitoring the implementation and impact of the development.

RESOLVED that

1. The draft consultation response to the Longfield Solar Farm Development Consent Order set out at Appendix 1 to the report to the meeting be endorsed.
2. The draft Local Impact Report set out in Appendix 2 be endorsed and that the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development be authorised finalise the Local Impact Report to enable its submission to the Planning Inspectorate by the submission date.
3. The Director of Sustainable Communities and his appointed Officers be authorised to engage within and respond on behalf of Chelmsford City Council on all matters relating to the Examination and subsequently thereafter.

(7.23pm to 7.49pm)

7. Review of Adopted Chelmsford Local Plan – Update

The report to the Policy Board gave an update on the next steps and timetable for the review of the adopted Chelmsford Local Plan. The whole Local Plan would be reviewed but the focus for any necessary updates would be on the following:

- changes to legislation, national policy and guidance since adoption

- updates to the Council's Technical Evidence Base
- changes to the Council's Strategic Priorities
- meeting the development needs of Chelmsford within the new plan-period
- analysis of the performance of the adopted Local Plan through its monitoring framework.

In response to a question from members, the Policy Board was informed that new development sites would need to be allocated as part of extending the life of the Local Plan to 2041 and this issue would be considered as part of the Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation to be presented to a future meeting.

RESOLVED that the update on the review of the adopted Local Plan be noted.

(7.49pm to 7.57pm)

8. Strategic Housing and Employment Land Assessment (SHEELA) – Update to Methodology and Criteria Note

The Policy Board was informed that the SHELAA provided a high-level profile of sites in Chelmsford promoted by developers and landowners. It identified a wide range of site characteristics; highlighted the strengths and constraints that sites may face in achieving the local authority requirements; and established the likelihood of site developability and deliverability. Its purpose was not to allocate land for future development; instead, the assessment outcomes were considered alongside other evidence base documents to enable officers and members to make informed decisions of where to allocate future development.

The methodology and criteria that the SHELAA followed was developed and periodically updated by officers internally to ensure that they continued to reflect both national and local policy. Accordingly, in preparation for the upcoming review of the Local Plan, officers had reviewed and refined the SHELAA methodology and criteria to reflect emerging national and local priorities as well as to provide greater clarity and transparency to stakeholders on how the process was carried out. Appendix 1 to the report detailed the updates that had been made to the methodology, together with the reasons for doing so. Appendix 2 set out the updated Criteria Note, the purpose of which was to list the suitability, availability, and achievability criteria that each site was measured against, along with details on how the tally of scores against each criterion determined the site's performance.

The Policy Board endorsed the proposed changes to both documents.

RESOLVED that the changes to the SHELAA Methodology and Criteria Note be noted.

(7.57pm to 8.08pm)

9. Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Register – Proposed Consultation

The report to the meeting proposed that consultation be carried out on the proposal to introduce a locality test for the purpose of identifying those on or applying to join the Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Register who had a local connection to the administrative area of Chelmsford. This would align the Register with the priority mechanisms stipulated within the Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document and supported in the Self-Build Advice Note, which sought to prioritise local demand. Introducing a locality test would separate the Register out into two parts. Part 1 of the Register would detail those applicants who evidenced that they had a local connection to Chelmsford in addition to meeting the standard eligibility criteria. Part 2 detailed those who met the standard eligibility criteria but did not have a local connection to Chelmsford.

Responding to questions from and points made by members during discussion of the report, officers said that:

- from the end of each base period, the Council had three years in which to give permission for a sufficient number of plots of land which were suitable for self-build and custom housebuilding to meet the demand in its area. The Council had met that requirement for all base periods and it was anticipated that there would be no shortfall in the number of future planning permissions granted;
- the nationality criteria was set by legislation and could not be changed by the Council;
- the definition of “live” in the context of the eligibility criteria would include rough sleepers and sofa surfers if they were able to demonstrate a local connection;
- it would be clearer if the list of criteria for eligibility of Part 1 was preceded by the words “one of the following criteria”;
- a Key Worker was defined in the National Planning Policy Framework and the definition had not been further refined by the City Council in the adoption of its planning policies. However, the review of the evidence base document as part of the review of the Local Plan may enable the definition to be further refined.

RESOLVED that

1. Consultation be carried out on the proposal to introduce a locality test for the Self Build and Custom Housebuilding Register.
2. The consultation process set out in the report to the meeting and Appendices 2 and 3 be approved.
3. Any subsequent adjustments to the locality test prior to consultation be delegated to the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development.
4. The consultation feedback and any subsequent proposed changes to the locality test be referred to the Cabinet for approval.

(8.08pm to 8.24pm)

10. Chelmsford Policy Board Work Programme

The Board received the latest version of its Work Programme for 2022-23. It was informed that it may be necessary to move the date of the next meeting to 14 July 2022 to enable member input into the Council's response to the National Grid proposals (minute number 5 above) but that would be confirmed when the response for an extension to the deadline for the Council's response had been received.

RESOLVED that the latest Work Programme of the Board be noted.

(8.24pm to 8.29pm)

11. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.29pm

Chair