

COUNCIL

7 JULY 2015

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING

A.1: PETITION - WEELEY

(Report prepared by Catherine Bicknell)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To consider a petition of over 700 signatures received by the Council relating housing proposals in Weeley.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Council has received a petition about proposals for housing development at Weeley, submitted by Carol Bannister and signed by over 700 people,
- The petition objects to housing proposals in Weeley on the basis that they would harm the community, character and rural environment.
- Receipt of the petition was reported to Council on 10 February 2015 and it was agreed that the petition be investigated and considered at the first ordinary meeting of the Council following the Annual Meeting.
- The issues raised in the petition will be considered as part of the Local Plan making process that is the work of the Local Plan Committee.
- It is recommended that the Local Plan Committee be asked to consider the petition as part of the evidence that contributes to development of the Local Plan.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council refers the petition to the Local Plan Committee for consideration during the preparation of the Local Plan Preferred Options.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

Adoption of an up-to-date Local Plan is a priority for the Council. This petition relates to the location and scale of housing which will be an important element of the Local Plan.

FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK

Finance and Other Resources

The Council has budgeted to produce an up-to-date local plan. Consideration of the petition within this process can be done within the existing budget provision.

Risk

The Council is required to produce a Local Plan that is based on adequate, up-to-date and

relevant evidence about economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area. This will include the issues of community, character and agricultural land raised by the petitioners. Considering the issues raised will therefore reduce the risk of the Plan being considered unsound.

LEGAL

The Council adopted its Petition Policy on 11 February 2014. In accordance with the procedure, officers have investigated the content of the petition. Council may now consider the petition.

The subject of the petition relates to the allocation of land for housing through the Local Plan making process. This is a non-executive function that lies with the Local Plan Committee. Council can therefore recommend to the Local Plan Committee that it takes account of issues in its deliberations and the future content of the Local Plan for consultation, before the Plan is referred back to Council for approval at a later date.

The Government says that a local planning authority should submit a local plan for examination which it considers is “sound” – namely that it is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. To demonstrate that it is justified the government says that it should be the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence. In order to achieve this, the issues, evidence and representations about one proposal, such as land at Weeley, need to be considered as part of the overall process alongside alternatives and as part of the overall strategy.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.

Crime and Disorder / Equality and Diversity / Health Inequalities / Area or Ward affected / Consultation/Public Engagement.

A petition has been received and should be considered under the new procedure.

Consultation and public engagement

The Local Plan preparation process includes public consultation and engagement at various points. It is likely that an Options paper will be published Summer 2015 and it is planned to publish a Preferred Options version of the Local Plan early in 2016; both of these will be subject to public consultation. The preferred options will be selected by assessment of options against sustainability criteria, taking into account evidence gathered. This will include issues raised by local residents as well as statutory consultees and developers.

Residents of Weeley will have opportunities through the plan making process to contribute their views and suggestions.

Area or Ward Affected

Little Clacton and Weeley Ward

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

The Council has received a petition which is signed by more than 700 people. It reads:

We the undersigned object to such a huge increase in housing for our village over the next 17 years on the grounds that it will destroy our community, ruin the character of our rural environment and take up agricultural land in a farming area.

The Council is preparing a Local Plan and this work is being progressed through the Local Plan Committee. In doing so the Council must comply with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). This requires that local planning authorities set out the strategic priorities for the area, including the homes and jobs needed. It also says that Local Plans should plan positively for the development and infrastructure required in the area to meet the objectives, principles and policies of the Framework. The Framework also requires local planning authorities to ensure that the Local Plan is based on adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence.

Specifically in relation to housing, the Framework says that local planning authorities should prepare a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment to establish realistic assumptions about the availability, suitability and the likely economic viability of land to meet the identified need for housing over the plan period.

The Local Plan Committee, on 13 May 2014 considered Report A3 Housing and Employment growth in the new Local Plan and resolved that the new version of the Local Plan will include proposals and policies that aim to deliver at least 12,120 new homes and 5,000 new jobs in the Tendring District over the 17 year period 2014 to 2031.

The Local Plan Committee on 15 July 2014 considered Report A2 Vision and Spatial Strategy and resolved that the spatial strategy set out in that report be agreed for potential inclusion in the new version of the Local Plan. The spatial strategy included:

- a focus on employment related activity and new homes to meet the needs of the growing population at Harwich and the A120 corridor;
- co-operation with Colchester Borough Council and others to explore options to deliver high tech industry and new housing;
- a focus on service sector industries, housing for older and retired people, tourism and health facilities in the seaside towns and
- in the rural heartland, major growth at Weeley Garden Village with a focus on new family homes.

The Local Plan Committee on 21 October 2014 considered report A2 Garden Suburbs and Strategic Employment Sites and gave provisional agreement for the proposed garden suburbs (including at Weeley) and employment sites to enable further engagement to take place with partner organisations, relevant developers, landowners, Town and Parish Councils and Ward Councillors.

The Local Plan Committee 27 November 2014 considered Report A1 (Garden Suburbs and Strategic Employment Sites - Update Report), where it was reported that the general public and community representatives had highlighted strong concerns about the impacts of additional housing in Weeley. The site promoters of land west of Weeley Village, between the A133 and the Weeley Bypass and east of Weeley Village, between Thorpe Road and the railway line were broadly supportive of the provisional policy, concept plan and delivery schedule and had provided additional information for the Committee to consider.

The Local Plan Committee is tasked with producing a recommended Local Plan for Tendering for the Council to approve after following a programme of meetings to progress this work. The process includes a number of formal consultation stages when members of the public as well as public bodies, developers, interest groups and others can contribute to the Plan. It is recommended that the petition is considered as part of this process.

BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION

Local Plan Committee 13 May 2014 – Report A3 Housing and employment growth in the new local plan

Local Plan Committee 15 July 2014 - Report A2 Vision and Spatial Strategy

Local Plan Committee 21 October 2014 - Report A2 Garden suburbs and strategic employment sites

Local Plan Committee 27 November 2014 – Report A1 Garden suburbs and strategic employment sites update report

APPENDICES

None