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Elmbridge Borough Council

Cabinet

Report of a meeting held on 24 July 2019

Members of the Cabinet:

S.J. Selleck (Leader)

* A. Davis (Deputy Leader)

*	Mrs. C. Elmer	*	C.R. Sadler
*	C.R. Green	*	Mrs. T. Shipley
*	Mrs. M. Marshall		Mrs. J.R. Turner
*	Mrs. K. Randolph		

Also present:

D.J. Archer, J.W. Browne, A.P. Burley, B.J.F. Cheyne, Mrs. C.J. Cross, B. Fairbank,
N. Houston, M.F. Howard, Mrs. S.R. Kapadia, A. Kelly, Rachael I. Lake,
Mrs. V. Macleod, Mrs. R. Mitchell and M. Rollings

13/19 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Matter of Report

14/19 Draft Options Consultation

The Portfolio Holder for Planning introduced the report and reminded the Cabinet that the Council was preparing a new Local Plan which would set out how communities and places within the Borough would develop over the next 15 years.

The Local Plan was a statutory requirement and the Government had made it clear that all local authorities must have an up-to-date Local Plan. The Council's current plan had been adopted in 2011 and although many aspects of policies within the Plan remained compliant with national planning policy and were still highly effective in assisting to bring forward sustainable development in the Borough, the Council's housing target was out of date.

The Government, in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), had reinforced its objectives to significantly boost the supply of homes in England and ensure that growth should be genuinely plan-led. In this regard, the number of new homes the Council was expected to plan for, as set by the Government's standard methodology, was 623 new homes per year.

The Cabinet noted that the Local Plan would be examined by an independent Local Plans Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State to assess whether it had been prepared with legal and procedural requirements and whether it was sound.

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As the new Local Plan was required to be informed by an evidence base, the Portfolio Holder advised that for the past four years, the Council had been preparing a series of technical documents on a wide range of topics in order to understand what new development was needed, how much new development could be accommodated in the Borough and where it should be located.

With regard to the Local Plan preparation to date, the Portfolio Holder reminded Members that as a result of the Strategic Options Consultation held in 2016 and having considered the evidence base and the sustainability of the options, the Council had considered Option 2 (Meet as much need as possible through a combination of amending Green Belt boundaries to remove land that is performing weakly against the criteria of that designation and through increasing densities in the urban area where appropriate) to be its preferred option at that time. However, in view of the large number of representations received regarding the outcome of the Green Belt Boundary Review 2016 and taking into account the publication of a new National Planning Policy Framework, it had been considered appropriate to remove Option 2 as the Council's preferred option and take the opportunity to review and re-evaluate the options previously put forward in the Strategic Options Consultation 2016.

The Cabinet noted that this review and re-evaluation, which had included additional technical work, had led to the identification of five options as to how the Local Plan could respond to housing need. It was further noted that this included the original three options which had evolved together with two new options.

The Portfolio Holder then took the opportunity to provide a detailed overview of the Draft Options Consultation document which set out the context for the Local Plan together with the challenges and opportunities. This document introduced the five options, each of which had been informed by the evidence available on other spatial matters including employment, infrastructure, transport and the environment. The Portfolio Holder stressed that this was not a site allocations document and the sites included had not in any way been agreed. As the Council had been criticised during the last consultation for not providing indicative numbers or sites that would support each option, the Portfolio Holder reported that an indication of the sites that could come forward had been provided. Whilst these sites had not been filtered by officers or Members, the Cabinet acknowledged that the weighing up of sites would be completed at the Regulation 19 stage as part of the draft plan consultation.

Members noted that the document would also introduce the need to review the Development Management Plan policies as well as summarising the work undertaken in relation to infrastructure. It was acknowledged that to date, the high-level draft Initial Review of the Development Management policies had been undertaken and the majority were working well and would not therefore require significant amendments regardless of the option chosen as the preferred development strategy. However, there were a number that would require significant amendments given that there was a lot of repetition which could be confusing for those applying for planning permission.

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An overview of the options was also provided, the details of which were outlined in the report, and it was considered that the following were reasonable alternatives for the development strategy to underpin the new Local Plan:

- Option 1 – Intensify urban area;
- Option 2 – Optimise urban area and 3 areas of Green Belt release;
- Option 3 – Optimise urban land and large Green Belt release;
- Option 4 – Optimise urban land; and
- Option 5 – Optimise urban land and small areas of Green Belt release.

The Portfolio Holder reported that a public consultation exercise, seeking the community's views on the five options for housing growth, would be taking place between Monday 19 August 2019 and Monday 30 September 2019. In light of the comments received from the respondents to the Strategic Options Consultation 2016, a much simpler questionnaire had been produced in respect of the Draft Options Consultation.

In addition, a Consultation Strategy had also been prepared which set out how the Council would consult with residents and key stakeholders in respect of the Draft Options Consultation. A timetable was included with the Strategy setting out the details of the engagement and specifically the key milestones for communication with Members, Surrey County Councillors and Claygate Parish Council. This would be followed by the early publicity methods including pre-consultation meetings with residents' associations and community groups to help improve communication and build relationships with the community.

Members noted that the Local Plan Working Group had discussed the documents in detail and it was acknowledged that the comments made by this Group had been included within the documents being considered by the Cabinet.

In concluding her introduction, the Portfolio Holder advised that the report also requested delegated authority being given to the Head of Planning Services to make some minor alterations which included points of clarity and a small number of typographical and formatting errors.

In accordance with Part 5-30 of the Council's Constitution, the Deputy Leader invited Councillor J.W. Browne, Leader of the Conservative Group to address the Cabinet. Councillor Browne reminded Members that the document had been developed under both the Residents' Associations & Liberal Democrats Administration (2016/17; 2017/18; and 2019/20) and the Conservative Administration (2018/19) and accordingly, all Members of the Council had been involved at some point with its development. As part of his statement, Councillor Browne commented that he had been slightly concerned that no preferred option had been put forward. However, he understood that as a result of advice received from the Council's retained QC, including a preferred option could give members of the public the view or assumption that the Council had already made a decision in this regard. Given that the Council had been criticised in 2016/17 for supporting a preferred option, he was content that Option 2 was being superseded as the preferred option and that there would be no preferred option identified going forward. Councillor Browne agreed that the document was

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challenging and that all residents should consider it carefully and take the opportunity to respond. He reiterated the Government's wish that Elmbridge build over 600 houses per year which it was acknowledged was a considerable increase on the number currently required. He further commented that this number had been determined through the Government's Objectively Assessed Housing Need calculations and in his opinion, he considered that it was no longer objectively assessed as one of the inputs had been changed the previous year which would have reduced the numbers. However, the Government had insisted that the previously set larger figure remain in place. Councillor Browne advised that the Conservative Group would be taking part in the consultation and would be encouraging local residents to also respond. Councillor Browne also took the opportunity to remind Members of a statement that the new Prime Minister had made when he had been one of the candidates seeking the office of the leadership of the Conservative Group. The new Prime Minister had previously stated that the Government should not be imposing targets on Councils that they were simply finding impossible to meet without building on the Green Belt so the Government had to be much more sensitive about what it was doing. Councillor Browne commented that should the residents agree with this statement, then the Council and himself as the Leader of the Conservative Group in Elmbridge, would hold him to account. In concluding his comments, Councillor Browne stated that, the document in its current format, had the support of the Conservative Group.

The Cabinet then discussed the report and the Portfolio Holder for Housing, who was a member of the Local Plan Working Group, thanked his fellow Members of the Working Group and all the officers for the hard work that had been undertaken over the last four years that had resulted in a consultation document that included the right information and asked the right questions. He also took the opportunity to praise both Councillors B.J.F. Cheyne and Mrs. S.R. Kapadia, who had acted as Chairman of that Working Group over the four-year period. The Portfolio Holder for Housing further commented that as part of this process, there were a number of Development Management Plan policies that required review, particularly in respect of car parking. With regard to the requirement to build 623 new homes a year, he stressed that, given the growing need for more social housing units, the whole Borough needed to take its share of new houses and not just some parts of the Borough. Furthermore, with this increase in new homes year on year, the Portfolio Holder for Housing considered that more money from Government was required in order to provide the necessary infrastructure. He concluded that he was supportive of protecting the Borough's Green Belt and that to do this, alternative ways should also be considered.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning welcomed the statement made by Councillor J.W. Browne and agreed that the development of a new Local Plan should be a non-party political exercise. She acknowledged the huge amount of work undertaken by officers and took the opportunity to thank them for all their efforts.

The Portfolio Holder for Community and Corporate Development also thanked the Planning Services Team, in particular for the preparation of the comprehensive consultation plan and process. Whilst acknowledging the various engagement methods being used for this particular consultation, she commented that she was pleased to note that six formal chaired panel style consultation events would be

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held at the Civic Centre in late August / early September 2019 and these would all be webcast and therefore available to view through the Council's website.

The Portfolio Holder for Social Affairs also thanked the officers for all the work undertaken in this regard and in particular the Head of Planning Services who she considered had led her team from the front with her in-depth knowledge and approach. She also thanked the Portfolio Holder for Planning who had shown great resilience on this project. Whilst supporting the recommendations outlined in the report, she hoped that the residents engaged with this consultation and that they considered the Borough as a whole and not just their immediate environment.

On consideration of the report and recommendations, the Cabinet

Resolved that

- (a) the Council's previous Preferred Option, as set out in the Strategic Options Consultation 2016, be superseded;
- (b) the need to review the Development Management Plan policies and the intention to incorporate this work into the Local Development Scheme be noted and agreed;
- (c) the Options Consultation Document and Options Consultation Questionnaire, as attached at Appendices A and B respectively to the report, be approved for the purposes of consultation subject to the Head of Planning Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, being authorised to make any necessary final adjustments to wording; and
- (d) a six-week consultation period commencing 19 August 2019, in accordance with the Options Consultation Strategy, as attached at Appendix C to the report, and the Council's Statement of Community Involvement 2018, be approved.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 7.17 pm

A. Davis
Deputy Leader (in the Chair)

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Democratic Services Officer

Mrs. T. Hulse Principal Committee and Member Services Officer

Other Officers in attendance

R. Moran	Chief Executive
R. Lee	Strategic Director
A. Harrison	Head of Legal Services
Mrs. K. Tagliarini	Head of Planning Services
T. Ridley	Interim Planning Policy and Strategy Manager
Mrs. R. Thorold	Local Plan Manager
Mrs. S. Kiely	Play Development Officer