

NOTES OF CASTLE POINT PLAN BOARD

20 June 2024

Present:

Councillors: Gibson (Chair), Fuller, Palmer, Copsey, Lillis and Savage.

Officers in attendance: Caroline Adlem (Director Corporate and Customer), Amanda Parrott (Assistant Director of Climate and Growth), Gavin Ball (Principal Planning Officer), Maria Hennessy (Senior Planning Policy Officer), Matt Amner (Planning Policy Officer),

Apologies: Councillors Blackwell and Mountford, Angela Hutchings (Chief Executive), Ian Butt (Director of Place and Communities), Dominic Chessum (Communications) Neil Gale (Planning Policy Officer – Engagement).

1. Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Appraisal.

Both of these documents are required to accompany all plans. They identify the potential impacts of draft policies and the mitigations available to address them. They act as a feedback loop in order to make the Local Plan more sustainable. We are legally required to consult on the scope of these documents with Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency. At this stage the documents:

- Scope potential sustainability issues and environmental impacts
- Set out the framework for assessing the sustainability of the CP Plan as it emerges
- Set out an initial assessment of the strategic development options to test the framework

The role of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is to assess the policy approaches. The completed SA will test the policies in the CP Plan, and the sites that are proposed for development. A separate site assessment framework is proposed for urban sites and green belt sites, as the scale and impacts vary. For example townscape is a greater consideration for urban sites, landscape is a greater consideration for green belt sites.

The SA sets out 20 sustainability criteria, and each policy and site will be assessed against these criteria to identify the positive and negative impacts. The initial assessment is undertaken in a 'policy off' manner and then mitigations are proposed through the assessment to address any potential negative impacts. This leads to improved policies, as the SA can help provide solutions to potential issues through these mitigations.

Members had a question regarding who sets the criteria for the SA. The Council sets its own criteria based on the issues and challenges in the local area arising through the scoping work. The scoping consultation acts to ensure that these are right, and nothing has been missed. However, in terms of environmental considerations, there are specific regulations covering Strategic Environmental Assessment which require certain environmental factors to be considered.

Members asked if the SA can be used to determine the suitability of sites for inclusion in the plan. The suitability of sites for inclusion in the plan is addressed through the Strategic Land Availability Assessment. The role of the SA is to identify the impact of the decisions taken on sustainability to

compared to other reasonable alternatives and to aid in identifying mitigations that improve the overall sustainability of the Castle Point Plan.

2. Habitats Regulations Assessment

This assessment considers the impact of the policies and proposals on the integrity of Habitat sites. The scoping report looks at the sites that may be affected, the sensitivities of those sites and the types of development activities which might have an impact on those sensitivities. It then provides a framework that can be used to assess emerging policies or proposals to ensure that harm to integrity of habitats is avoided.

Members had concerns regarding how mitigations can be made to the Essex Coast Habitats Sites. Officers explained the role of Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (Essex RAMS).

Members asked if SSSI sites could be included to protect them from development. This is not the role of the Habitats Regulations Assessment. Impact on SSSIs is covered by the SA/SEA, and by national planning policy, however.

3. Equalities Impact Assessment

This assesses the equality impacts on protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010. These protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation. The scoping report looks at existing issues and literature around how planning and place making can impact on this with protected characteristics. It identifies potential criteria to assess the impact of the proposals in the Castle Point Plan on those protected characteristics. This also provides a framework that can be used to assess the impacts of emerging policies on protected characteristics and provides a basis for identifying and improving policies that deliver improved equality outcomes.

4. South Benfleet Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

This is prepared under separate planning legislation to the plan – Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990. It is used to assess the character and condition of the conservation area and sets out proposals for preservation and enhancements as necessary to improve the character and condition. The South Benfleet Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan was last reviewed in 2005.

A design code specific to the conservation area has also been drafted which is aimed at ensuring alterations and extensions to existing buildings within the Conservation Area to contribute towards the preservation and enhancement of character.

Before this updated plan can be adopted the Council is required to undertake consultation in the local area.

Members had questions about the council's ability to dictate the style of development within the Conservation Area to which officers briefed members about the role of the design code.

Members also had questions regarding changing the boundary of the Conservation Area. It is proposed that the boundary is reduced to remove non-heritage assets. Members were satisfied that heritage assets had not been removed.

5. AOB

It was agreed that feedback would be received on the documents by Friday 28th of June.