

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Epping Forest and Commons	6/7/2015
<b>Subject:</b> Seeking delegated authority to respond to the Epping Forest District Council Green Belt Review Stage 1	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Epping Forest (SEF 29/15)	<b>For Decision</b>

### Summary

Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) presented a Stage 1 Report on its Green Belt Review to key stakeholders on 15th June and provided a digital copy of the document, which is not yet in the public domain, on 19th June 2015. Based on the Government National Policy Planning Framework's (NPPF) five criteria for the national purposes of Green Belt land, the Stage 1 Report has selected areas of the EFDC Green Belt, which makes up over 92% of the District, for consideration for further assessment. This further assessment will then examine in more detail whether these areas might be suitable for development. Consideration of suitability and, thereby, removal from the Green Belt is to take place as part of the Stage 2 process.

A number of these selected areas lie close to Forest boundaries and within areas that might have an impact on the surrounding landscape, the tranquility and above all the 'natural aspect' of the Forest.

The District Council has asked for responses by 27th July so that its Cabinet can meet in August to decide how to proceed with Stage 2. Although Stage 2 is likely to be the more critical period of the Green Belt Review process, it is considered important that the Superintendent should make the Conservators' case at this stage to clearly raise the need to protect the Forest from the adverse impacts of development.

### Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to approve:

- delegated authority for the Chairman and Deputy Chairman to approve a response to be made by the Superintendent to Stage 1 of the Epping Forest District Council Green Belt Review.

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) presented its Stage 1 Green Belt Review Report (GBRR) to parish councils and other key stakeholders, including the Conservators of Epping Forest, at a meeting on 15th June 2015. The Head of Conservation attended this meeting and as a result a full digital copy of the document and appendices was then provided to us on Friday 19th June. The document at this stage remains non-public.
2. The Stage 1 assessment is aimed at providing a high-level review of Green Belt (GB) Land in the District against the five national purposes of the Green Belt set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that was published by the Government in 2011.
3. These five national purposes of the GB defined by the NPPF are as follows:
  - to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
  - to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
  - to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
  - to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;
  - to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict land and other urban land.

Of these 5 criteria only the first 4 were used to assess the suitability of the individual GB areas in EFDC. The fifth criterion was considered as a strategic issue for the District, taken as a whole, and not one which could be used to assess the suitability of an individual parcel of GB.

### **Current Position**

4. The GBRR provides scores against these 4 criteria for each GB parcel within EFDC and uses the aggregate scores, alongside the considerations of the remoteness and sustainability of any new developments, to select GB areas for further assessment. The further assessment of these selected areas will be carried out in Stage 2 at which point parts of the GB will be proposed for removal from GB protection.
5. Initially EFDC set a deadline for responses by Monday 29th June, but following strong objections to this short deadline, the Council's Cabinet agreed to extend the deadline until noon on 27th July 2015. Nonetheless, this deadline has not allowed sufficient time for officers to provide your Committee with a full proposed response to the issues raised in the Stage 1 GBRR or the selection of areas for further assessment.
6. The selected areas include parts of the GB close to Epping Forest and it is proposed that a detailed response should be prepared in relation to our support for the GB and its protection of the Forest's 'natural aspect'.
7. It should be noted that in the GBRR Stage 1 assessment the Buffer Lands have been ruled out from any further assessment as "although not a formal part of the Forest" they have been clearly demarcated as not available for development.

8. The EFDC Cabinet is due to meet on 27th August to consider the report and make its recommendations for moving to Stage 2. There will be further consultation by EFDC during and after the Stage 2 process.

### **Proposals**

9. It is proposed that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman are delegated the authority to approve a full written response by the Superintendent on behalf of the Conservators to support the integrity of the GB around the Forest and to object to the breaking up of any GB parcels which might allow future developments to damage the 'natural aspect' of the Forest and its environs.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

10. **Together Strategy:** The proposal set out above meets the *City Together* vision of a "World Class City" addressing one of the 5 themes: "A World Class City which protects, promotes and enhances our environment".

### **Implications**

11. There are no further implications of the proposals in this report than those set out above.

### **Conclusions**

The Green Belt Review being conducted by Epping Forest District Council has reached the end of its first Stage and the Conservators have been consulted as one of the key stakeholders, along with Parish and District Councillors. The selection of areas for further assessment in the Green Belt provides a potential challenge to the protection of the Forest's 'natural aspect' from the impacts of new infrastructure developments and housing. Therefore, this report seeks delegated authority for the Superintendent to engage with the District Council by responding to its report by the 27th July deadline highlighting the importance of protecting the Forest's environs.

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