
Meeting: Executive
Date: 10 November 2009
Subject: LDF (North): Site Allocations Development Plan Document
Report of: Cllr Tom Nicols, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development
Summary: The report proposes consideration of this draft Development Plan Document (DPD) in advance of consideration by Council for pre-submission public consultation and submission to the Secretary of State.

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities
Contact Officer: Simon Andrews, LDF Team Leader (North Team)
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council
Key Decision Yes
**Reason for urgency/
exemption from call-in
(if appropriate)** Not applicable

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Submission of this Development Plan Document is an important part of the Council's priority of managing growth effectively. Providing for well-located sites for new homes and jobs and ensuring this development is accompanied by the full range of supporting infrastructure is crucial to securing the sustainability of both new development and the existing communities in Central Bedfordshire.

Financial:

The revenue cost for work in the current year (principally employee time) is included in the Central Bedfordshire Approved Revenue Budget for 2009/10 (26 February 2009). The additional costs of Public Examination, likely to be in the next financial year can be paid for from equalised reserves earmarked for this specific purpose. Timely progress on DPDs is linked to financial incentives for the Council through the Government's Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG). Submission of this DPD will not occur until May 2010 so any enhanced award will not be paid until 2011. The amount received will be dependant on adhering to the published timetable for LDF documents set out in the Local Development Scheme (LDS).

Legal:

This is a statutory document, part of the Local Development Framework and will form part of the Development Plan. It is a statutory requirement to produce an LDF under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The LDF process is regulated by the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 and subsequent amendments. The determination and consideration of Development Plan Documents is a function of Council under the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) Regulations.

Risk Management:

The most significant risk to this process is that the document may be found “unsound” through the Examination process and that work would need to begin again. This would have implications in terms of resources but would also leave a policy vacuum while additional work is undertaken. In order to avoid this, a number of methods are available to test “soundness” prior to Examination and a self-assessment toolkit will be used on the draft submission DPD.

There is also a risk that the process may be delayed, either through a change in Government guidance or through other unforeseen circumstances.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

None

Equalities/Human Rights:

The draft submission DPD will need to be screened for Equality and Diversity Issues. Arrangements have been put in place for this to be done.

Community Safety:

The location and design of new development can have an impact on community safety. The list of sites and the draft policies will therefore be subject to consultation with community safety teams, both internally and externally.

Sustainability:

The draft DPD will be assessed under the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment requirements as set out in the Government’s Planning Policy Statement 12. The selection of sites and the criteria used are aimed at identifying the most sustainable of the sites put forward.

RECOMMENDATION:

that the Executive considers the sites attached at Appendix 2 and agrees them as the basis of the draft submission version of the Site Allocations Development Plan Document to be considered by Council.

Reason for Recommendation(s): To ensure the Council complies with the statutory requirement to produce a Development Plan through the production of the Local Development Framework (North).

Background

1. The Local Development Framework (LDF) is a series of documents which collectively deliver the spatial planning strategy for Central Bedfordshire. The LDF (North Area) covers the former Mid Bedfordshire Area and the LDF (South Area) is prepared jointly with Luton Borough under the Joint Committee. The system differs from the Local Plan Process in that the Core Strategy, which is the key plan within the LDF has a wider remit than purely land use planning with a strong link to the Sustainable Communities Strategy and an emphasis on delivery.
2. Development Plan Documents (DPD), a component part of the LDF, make up the statutory Development Plan, together with the East of England Plan. The statutory process of preparing a DPD is set out in the Planning Regulations and comprises many stages and types of consultation which have been to date considered by the former Mid Beds LDF Members Task Force and in some instances direct Councillor Briefings. Under the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations, agreeing a document for submission to the Secretary of State of the DPD is a function of the Council.

The Site Allocations DPD.

3. This document is part of the LDF (North Area) and commenced in early 2007. It is based on the broad spatial strategy set out in the Core Strategy and applies it at the site-specific level, identifying specific sites for a variety of uses. The Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD has recently been through a Public Examination and is due to be considered by Council on 19 November for adoption (see elsewhere on this agenda).
4. The Core Strategy provides for a total of 17,950 new homes and 17,000 new jobs between 2001 and 2026. Of these, a large number have already been completed or have planning permission. The residual requirement to be provided for in the Site Allocations DPD is 5,000 new homes and 77 hectares of land for employment purposes.
5. The approach in the Core Strategy was to focus on the larger settlements in the former Mid Bedfordshire area (known as “Major Service Centres” and “Minor Service Centres”), with less emphasis on the Large and Small Villages. This approach has been carried through into the Site Allocations.
6. To meet the requirements of the Core Strategy the Council invited submissions of suitable land from landowners, developers and other interested parties. Around 440 potential sites were submitted and these were subject to large-scale public consultation through the “Talk to Mid Beds” campaign during 2008. This consultation included around 20 local exhibitions in village and community halls, a leaflet posted to every household and a dedicated website where comments could be posted. The result was nearly 11,000 comments which were summarised and the results used as part of the process of defining the final list of sites.

7. There has been significant Member involvement in the process to date. Prior to April this year the former Mid Beds LDF Member Task Force oversaw the work, receiving reports on the site submissions, the arrangements for public consultation and the broad scope of the criteria to be used to determine sites. Regular progress updates were reported to the Scrutiny Committee. Specific Member briefing sessions were held prior to the Talk to Mid Beds consultation where details of all site submissions, together Ordnance Survey plans were distributed to Members. A bus tour took Members around a large number of the potential sites and workshops were held with local Members to raise awareness and seek initial views on the suitability of sites.
8. With around 440 potential sites to choose from and only a small percentage of these actually required, a criteria-based approach was agreed by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 September 2009 in order to select the most sustainable and the most suitable of the sites. The priorities and relative importance of aspects of this criteria were subject to informal consultation prior to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee's consideration. A copy of the criteria is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. The agreed criteria have been applied and the results considered through a series of meetings of the Development Strategy Task Force.
9. Appendix 2 sets out the sites that have been recommended by the Task Force and the view of Executive is now sought on these sites, prior to consideration by Council on 19 November.

Conclusion and Next Steps

10. As set out above, agreeing a DPD for submission to the Secretary of State is a function of Council. Once Executive have considered the list of sites, Council will be asked to consider the draft submission DPD, which will include the sites and detailed policies setting out the Council's expectations in terms of the development proposed.
11. Once agreed the draft DPD must be subject to pre-submission consultation. This consultation will be widespread and will include all those who previously made comments on the sites during 2008. Following this consultation the DPD will be submitted to the Secretary of State, together with any proposed changes. This is expected to be around May 2010. A Public Examination will then be held before the Inspector writes a report (expected towards the end of next year).
12. Selecting sites for allocation in this way is an important part of the Council's work to manage growth effectively. It is important that provision is made for new homes and jobs within Central Bedfordshire, not simply to meet Government targets but to provide for those people needing housing or employment. By providing sufficient well-located sites in advance the Council can plan positively for new development, bring certainty to local communities and ensure appropriate supporting infrastructure is in place. Without a supply of allocated sites the Council would be open to challenge and would find it much more difficult to resist opportunistic development in countryside locations.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Site selection criteria

Appendix 2 – list of sites recommended by the Development Strategy Task Force

Background Papers: (Report on the Examination into the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD by John Mattocks, an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government)

Location of papers: Priory House, Chicksands