

Luton & South Bedfordshire Joint Committee

23 July 2010

Agenda Item No. 9

AUTHOR	Simon Andrews – Team Leader, Joint Technical Unit
SUBJECT	Summary of recent technical studies.
PURPOSES	To outline to Members the outcome of recent technical studies, any implications for future LDF work and any resulting changes made to the Core Strategy.
RECOMMENDATIONS	That the findings of the technical studies outlined below be noted.
REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS	To ensure the Core Strategy is based on the most up-to-date and relevant evidence available.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Since the last Joint Committee meeting in October last year a number of new or updated technical studies have been produced that are of relevance to the Core Strategy. These are:

- Employment Land and Market Assessment Study – Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners;
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment – Joint Technical Unit;
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment – Bedfordshire and Luton Sub-regional Housing Partnership;
- Affordable Housing Thresholds Viability Assessment – Joint Technical Unit;
- Water Cycle Strategy Phase 2 – Halcrow;
- Sustainable Development and Adaptation and Mitigation of Climate Change Study - Parsons Brinckerhoff;
- Rural Settlements Sustainability Technical Paper - Joint Technical Unit;
- Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Funding Study – EDAW/AECOM; and
- Traffic modelling – Halcrow/Colin Buchanan & Partners/MVA.

1.2 This report briefly sets out the purpose of these studies, summarises the key findings and identifies the ways in which the Core Strategy has been amended or where amendments may be required in the future.

- 1.3 Website links to each of these studies are provided below. However, should Members require paper copies of any of the studies they can be provided on request to the Joint Technical Unit.

2. EMPLOYMENT LAND AND MARKET ASSESSMENT STUDY

- 2.1 This study was undertaken by consultants Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners and, building on the previous work by Halcrow, sought to provide advice on a range of employment related issues. In particular the study looked at the appropriate rates and phasing of employment land development to balance with housing provision, an assessment of the credentials of new employment sites and an identification of any policy or site-specific interventions needed to deliver the continued use or redevelopment of existing sites. The report is available at:
http://www.shapeyourfuture.org.uk/evidence_studies.html
- 2.2 Overall the Luton and South Bedfordshire area was considered to be a competitive location within the M1 corridor for industrial, particularly distribution uses, and for some office occupiers. However, demand may be tempered by provision elsewhere in the sub-region, particularly for higher levels of office park development, which remain relatively untested in this area.
- 2.3 The study examined the potential employment locations associated with the urban extensions and other potential sites and recommended a portfolio of sites best-placed to deliver new employment development based on current market views on likely future demand and capacity. The study also examined a more aspirational approach that reflects the job targets within the Regional Spatial Strategy and set out in the Core Strategy Preferred Options document. This more aspirational approach would rely on a major new office park development beside an M1 junction, with North Houghton Regis being the preferred location.
- 2.4 The consultants also examined existing underperforming employment sites to establish the scope for policy intervention to encourage redevelopment for employment purposes. The site-specific findings will need to be taken forward through the Site Allocations process as well as through the economic development work of both Councils.
- 2.5 This study was commissioned on the basis of the Preferred Options approach in terms of overall housing and job numbers and the sites emerging at that stage. If the housing and job numbers or the choice of urban extensions were to change the conclusions of this study may need to be revisited, although it is likely that many of the conclusions would still be relevant.

3. STRATEGIC HOUSING LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT (SHLAA)

- 3.1 An update to the Luton and South Bedfordshire Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment was produced in November 2009. The assessment provides evidence on the supply of land for housing development and informs the housing trajectory. It considers sites that are at least 0.2 hectares in size. The report is available at:
http://www.shapeyourfuture.org.uk/evidence_studies.html

3.2 The SHLAA identifies:

- 119 sites that are considered to start delivering 8,735 dwellings within the next five years.
- 29 sites that are considered to start delivering 2,813 dwellings between the next six to ten years.

3.3 The information presented in the report reflects the status of housing land availability as understood in November 2009. Since that time, the deliverability of identified sites may have changed and new sites may have appeared. At least one challenge to the November 2009 status has been raised in the form of a planning appeal regarding a site on Stoke Road, to the north of Leighton Linlade, although this appeal was refused by the Secretary of State in June 2010.

3.4 The next update of the SHLAA is expected towards the end of 2010. This will take into account changes to the deliverability of sites, any new sites that have emerged and any other sources of discussion on housing land availability as provided through appeals or other, similar processes. The update will either be available to inform the draft submission document or any changes prior to submission.

4. STRATEGIC HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT

4.1 The Bedfordshire and Luton Strategic Housing Market Assessment was published in March 2010. This study, undertaken by consultants Opinion Research Services and Savills on behalf of Bedford, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Councils, analyses local housing markets and provides evidence on housing conditions and need. A key output is the mix of housing required to 2021. The main report, an executive summary and eight supporting research papers are available at: www.luton.gov.uk/shma.

4.2 The following additional homes are needed between 2007 and 2021:

- Southern Bedfordshire: 4,300 social rented and 900 intermediate affordable out of a total of 16,900 homes. This indicates an affordable housing policy target of 31% (26% social renting and 5% intermediate housing);
- Luton: 3,300 social rented and 2,400 intermediate affordable out of a total of 4,700 homes. This indicates an affordable housing policy target of 100% (59% social renting and 41% intermediate housing);
- Luton and southern Bedfordshire combined: 7,700 social rented and 3,200 intermediate affordable out of a total of 21,600 homes. This indicates an affordable housing policy target of 51% (36% social renting and 15% intermediate housing).

4.3 While separate requirements are provided for southern Bedfordshire and Luton, it is recommended that a single, joint target is set. This recognises that some of Luton's overall housing requirements will be satisfied outside its boundary.

- 4.4 The SHMA recommends a joint, viable affordable housing target of 35% (25% social rented and 10% intermediate). The Core Strategy included elsewhere on this agenda includes the target of 35% affordable housing and also the 25%/10% tenure split. However, as recognised in the SHMA, an affordable housing requirement of 51% identified for the joint area is not considered viable and there will therefore be an element of need that will not be fully met through the planning system.

5. AFFORDABLE HOUSING THRESHOLDS VIABILITY STUDY

- 5.1 Evidence is required to set the site size threshold (for residential developments) at which affordable housing will be required. This work is being undertaken by officers of the Joint Technical Unit and is expected to be ready by early August.
- 5.2 The methodology closely follows that employed by the viability assessment research paper of the SHMA. Where the SHMA tested a range of affordable housing ratios as the main variable, the thresholds study will test a range of site sizes. The study will draw-upon any new and relevant evidence sources such as the Infrastructure Delivery Plan & Funding Study.
- 5.3 In advance of this work, the Core Strategy included elsewhere on this agenda contains an interim threshold for the provision of affordable housing which will be tested by the study. The results of the study can inform the draft Core Strategy to be considered at the next Joint Committee meeting.

6. WATER CYCLE STRATEGY PHASE 2

- 6.1 Following the completion of the Water Cycle Strategy (WCS) Phase 1 in December 2008, a WCS Phase 2 was commissioned in November 2008 and completed in June 2010. The WCS Phase 2 details the water cycle-related actions and infrastructure needed to facilitate planned growth in the Luton and southern Bedfordshire Growth Area. The report is available at:
http://www.shapeyourfuture.org.uk/evidence_studies.html
- 6.2 The WCS Phase 2 builds on the WCS Phase 1, which was used to inform the Core Strategy Preferred Options. The WCS Phase 2 addresses key areas of water efficiency, wastewater treatment, water quality, water resources, water supply, wastewater drainage, flood risk and surface water in relation to the preferred sustainable urban extensions as identified in the Core Strategy Preferred Options.
- 6.3 The WCS Phase 2 identifies high level infrastructure solutions but does not provide a detailed design of works as the infrastructure solutions that are ultimately implemented will be refined through detailed design and may also change between now and then to suit the changes to the development proposals. The WCS Phase 2 concludes that there are feasible solutions with a reasonable prospect of delivery for all the proposed strategic development sites.
- 6.4 A key finding of the WCS Phase 2 is the critical importance of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and discharge consents affecting not only future growth capacity but current development impact.

The WCS especially mentions phosphates and an uncertainty about the capacity of utilities to resolve source point contaminants through infrastructure investments alone - and therefore a recommendation that sustainable design of future development in terms of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems will have a critical cumulative contribution to make on meeting consent standards.

7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE STUDY

- 7.1 A study has been commissioned to examine what measures can be taken to adapt to, and mitigate against, the impacts of climate change within Luton and southern Bedfordshire. The study, which is still in draft form, makes a series of recommendations, particularly relating to energy and water efficiency. Those recommendations which might be suitable for inclusion within the Core Strategy are summarised below.
- 7.2 With regards to energy efficiency, the study recommends that all new residential development should be built to Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 immediately and to code level 6 (zero carbon) from 2016 onwards. The study also makes specific recommendations for each of the proposed Strategic Site Specific Allocations contained within the Core Strategy Preferred Options.
- 7.3 The study recognises that the Luton and southern Bedfordshire area lies within a region that is prone to serious water stress and therefore recommends that all new developments should be designed to achieve a minimum net water efficiency of 105 litres per person per day, in line with Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3/4. In addition, the study suggests that a net water efficiency of 80 litres per person per day should be achieved from 2016 in line with code level 6.
- 7.4 The study recommends that if it is not feasible or viable to meet the relevant code levels for energy and water efficiency, then a financial contribution should be made to an offset fund which can then be used to assist with the de-carbonisation of existing housing stock.
- 7.5 The finalised study will be used to inform an updated version of the Core Strategy Pre-Submission document that will be considered by Joint Committee later in the year.

8. RURAL SETTLEMENTS SUSTAINABILITY TECHNICAL PAPER

- 8.1 A technical paper is currently being prepared in order to assess the sustainability of the rural settlements in southern Bedfordshire. As part of the work, the facilities and services in each rural settlement are being recorded. A scoring system will then be used to establish which villages are the most sustainable and therefore have the potential to accommodate some development.
- 8.2 The technical paper will be used to inform an updated version of the Core Strategy Pre-Submission document that will be considered by Joint Committee later in the year.

9. INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY PLAN AND FUNDING STUDY

- 9.1 Luton Gateway, the Local Delivery Vehicle for the Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire Area, commissioned an Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Funding Study from EDAW/AECOM in May last year. Part of the reason for the commission was to help the newly formed Luton Gateway to prepare a business plan. However, an opportunity was also taken to undertake research that would assist the Joint Committee in preparing a Core Strategy for the area.
- 9.2 Therefore the Joint Technical Unit (JTU) advised the consultants on what would be of assistance to the JTU to prepare an Infrastructure Schedule suitable for inclusion in the Core Strategy. This work was concluded in January 2010. The study remains the property of Luton Gateway, though the content has helped provide context to the work of the JTU. It is expected that the Infrastructure Model that underpins the Study will be run again in order to take into account the changes made to the Core Strategy as may be agreed at this Meeting.

10. TRANSPORT MODELLING

- 10.1 Work has been undertaken with consultants and the Highways Agency to refine the Luton and South Bedfordshire Transport Model in order that the transport implications of the development planned can be understood. It is clear from the work undertaken to date that the existing network is congested and that it will become more congested in the future even without new development. This congestion on the network can make modelling future traffic flows extremely difficult.
- 10.2 New development does offer an opportunity to address these transport issues by limiting the generation of new traffic but also enhancing the public transport and road network to the benefit of existing residents and businesses. Having identified key congestion areas and junctions attention now needs to turn to mitigation and enhancement strategies that can enable the network to function effectively. This work is ongoing.

12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 Some of the studies outlined above were undertaken in-house by Joint Technical Unit staff. Other studies needed specialist skills and external consultants were required. The cost of these studies has been met from within existing Joint Technical Unit operating budgets.

13. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The studies themselves are not statutory and do not form part of the Development Plan. However, the findings could be material considerations in relation to planning applications. The key conclusions of the studies will be incorporated into the Core Strategy or other Development Plan Documents and these documents, following scrutiny through the Public Examination and subsequent adoption by the Joint Committee, will then become part of the statutory Development Plan.

14. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 The studies are technical documents and do not directly address equality issues. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken of the emerging draft Core Strategy and this work will continue as the Core Strategy progresses.