
Meeting: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 14 December 2010

Subject: Luton and South Bedfordshire Local Development Framework : Core Strategy – Pre Submission

Report of: Cllr Tom Nicols – Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development

Summary: To consider the Pre Submission Joint Core Strategy for Luton and Southern Bedfordshire and to respond to its publication accordingly.

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities

Contact Officer: Richard Fox, Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All in the southern (former South Beds) part of Central Bedfordshire

Function of: Executive

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The Local Development Framework is a fundamental part of the Council's priority to manage growth effectively.

Financial:

The funding for the publication and examination of the Core Strategy has already been identified within existing budgets.

Legal:

The Core Strategy, when adopted, will form part of the statutory Development Plan for the area.

Risk Management:

Failure to support the Pre Submission Core Strategy may lead to delay and uncertainty in the examination and subsequent adoption of the Core Strategy and may leave the Council vulnerable to hostile planning applications.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

None.

Equalities/Human Rights:

The wider LDF has been assessed by a Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report that considers equalities issues. This Scoping Report and associated equalities content has been taken forward to produce a Sustainability Appraisal for the Core Strategy.

A separate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was also conducted on the Core Strategy Preferred Options. The Pre Submission Core Strategy was prepared in-line with the Preferred Options and the recommendations of the associate EqIA.

Community Safety:

This is a theme considered within the Pre-Submission Core Strategy.

Sustainability:

Sustainability has been an overarching consideration in the preparation of the Core Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- 1. That the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend that Executive endorse the content of the Luton and Southern Bedfordshire Joint Core Strategy Pre-Submission Document.**

Background

1. The legacy authorities of Bedfordshire County and South Bedfordshire District with Luton Borough Council agreed to work together to formulate a joint approach to planning and transportation policies required to deliver the former Government's Sustainable Communities Agenda for Luton and South Bedfordshire.
2. Since November 2005, the Local Authorities have been working together to produce the Luton and South Bedfordshire Local Development Framework (LDF) and in June 2007, the Joint Committee was established by statutory instrument.
3. The Joint Technical Unit comprising officers from Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council, which supports the Joint Committee, has been progressing with the Joint Core Strategy, one of the key Development Plan Documents (DPDs) which forms part of the LDF. Whilst the Core Strategy has been produced in part by Central Bedfordshire Officers, both Local Authorities are statutory consultees and the process of seeking representations upon the Pre Submission Core Strategy could be flawed without having sought the views of the host authorities. This is the purpose of this report.

Previous Consultation - Luton and South Bedfordshire Core Strategy

4. The Core Strategy is one of the Development Plan Documents that collectively form the LDF. It is a strategic level document providing the overarching principles for development through the provision of a spatial vision, objectives and policies. Future, more detailed site specific DPDs will expand on the principles of the Core Strategy and will include detailed policy guidance to enable specific decisions on planning applications to be made.
5. In 2007 a consultation exercise was undertaken on the Core Strategy Issues and Options Paper. This set out various strategic spatial options to secure the implementation of growth across the plan area.
6. This led onto and informed the production of the Core Strategy Preferred Options report which set out the preferred policy approach for delivering the level of growth envisaged. The key objectives of the Preferred Options included the provision of a framework of strategic transport infrastructure; concentrating development within existing urban areas and the main conurbation first; strategic urban extensions; and delivering locally appropriate rural development. The Preferred Options report was presented to and agreed by the Council's Executive in June 2009 on the basis that it would provide for the growth requirements of the Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire area in the most sustainable way.

Changes to the Planning Framework

7. Since the Preferred Options report was endorsed by the Council, a number of changes have taken place which has impacted upon the production of the Core Strategy.
8. Following the election of the new Coalition Government, on 27th May 2010 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government wrote to all Local Planning Authorities stating the Government's intention to abolish Regional Strategies in the Localism Bill and that he expected them to have regard to this as a material consideration in planning decisions. On 6th July 2010 the Secretary of State announced the revocation of Regional Strategies and the return of decision-making on housing and planning to local councils.
9. However, on 10th November 2010 the High Court upheld a challenge by Cala Homes and quashed the Secretary of State's original decision to revoke Regional Strategies. The East of England Plan, together with its minimum requirement for housing provision therefore remains part of the statutory Development Plan.
10. Notwithstanding this, it remains the Government's stated intention to abolish Regional Strategies and the Secretary of State's letter of 27th May 2010 remains a material consideration. Therefore, given the future direction of policy and particularly the Localism Bill which is expected to be published shortly, while the East of England Plan remains a statutory document and cannot be ignored, it is sensible to begin planning on the basis of local need rather than the "minimum targets" approach the East of England Plan sets out.

11. On this basis, the Core Strategy now sets out the framework for the delivery of 23,000 dwellings between 2011 and 2026 along with 28,300 new jobs and all associated infrastructure to ensure the successful delivery of the strategy.
12. The timeframe for the Core Strategy has also been amended alongside the level of development to be provided as a result of the changing economic circumstances and the uncertainty surrounding the viability of developments and therefore their deliverability. Amending the length of the Strategy to cover the period 2011 to 2026 provides more certainty on the deliverability of the development proposals within the statutory requirements of providing a 15 year plan. Furthermore, it brings the Core Strategy for the south in line with the end date of the adopted Core Strategy for Northern Central Bedfordshire.
13. The previous Preferred Options report proposed a total of 43,200 dwellings across the Luton and southern Central Bedfordshire area between 2001 and 2031. This reflected the requirements of the East of England Plan. The Pre-Submission Core Strategy now plans for 23,000 dwellings in the area between 2011 and 2026. This figure represents the “local housing need” as established through a “net nil migration” approach to demographic modelling i.e. setting aside the effects of migration in to and out from the area, the level of need for new homes from within the local community. This approach is consistent with the Coalition Government’s Localism agenda in terms of returning decisions about the scale and location of new housing to the local level.
14. The reduction in the number of dwellings in line with the area’s natural growth projections and the provision of this growth over a shorter time frame will allow the strategy to be delivered in a manner which supports and benefits existing communities, and with the delivery of key pieces of infrastructure, such as the A5-M1 link road, in line with significant housing and employment development.
15. The Pre Submission Core Strategy focuses upon the delivery of development in the first instance within the existing urban conurbation which consists of Luton, Dunstable and Houghton Regis. This is balanced with the identification of 3 strategic urban extensions – to the east of Leighton Linlade, north of Houghton Regis and north of Luton – for the delivery of mixed use developments comprising housing, employment, infrastructure and community facilities and services. A fourth urban extension is identified as an extension to Century Park to the east of Luton to accommodate strategic employment growth.
16. Through concentrating development within the existing urban areas, the Core Strategy aims to regenerate the town centres within the Plan area. Chapter 11 of the Core Strategy considers each of the towns on an individual basis by identifying specific and relevant visions and policies in order to create more vibrant locations for people to live as well as to forge stronger local economies.
17. A fundamental element of the Core Strategy is the inclusion of the infrastructure schedule which identifies the infrastructure that is considered to be either critical or essential to the delivery of the Core Strategy. It also identifies the timings of the required infrastructure within the lifetime of the Plan as well as identified and potential funding sources.

18. The inclusion of the Infrastructure Schedule within the Core Strategy is key to ensuring that no development takes place within Luton or Southern Central Bedfordshire without the necessary and appropriate infrastructure being funded, or in place, beforehand. The Infrastructure Schedule is supported further within the Core Strategy through Policy CS3 'Developer Contributions for Infrastructure'.

Implications for Central Bedfordshire

19. The Luton and South Bedfordshire Core Strategy, once adopted by the Joint Committee, will provide a number of benefits for the southern part of Central Bedfordshire. The key benefits of the Core Strategy are considered to be:
- (a) It will provide a positive and balanced approach to the delivery of sustainable development across the southern Central Bedfordshire area;
 - (b) It will contribute to achieving Central Bedfordshire Council's Economic Powerhouse Agenda;
 - (c) It will be instrumental in achieving the successful delivery of the A5-M1 link road;
 - (d) It will be a fundamental element in the delivery of key strategic infrastructure across the southern area to the benefit of existing as well as future communities;
 - (e) It will play an essential role in providing for the regeneration of two key urban areas within southern Central Bedfordshire, namely Dunstable and Houghton Regis, as well as contributing to the regeneration of the wider urban conurbation which includes Luton.
20. The benefits of the Core Strategy for the Southern part of Central Bedfordshire are therefore wide ranging and will contribute significantly to improving the area as a whole for all Central Bedfordshire's current and future residents.

Next Steps

21. The following timetable sets out that which will lead to the adoption of the Luton and South Bedfordshire Core Strategy.
- Publication of the Pre Submission Core Strategy - 29th Nov 2010;
 - 7 week period until mid-January 2011 for representations to the Core Strategy to be submitted;
 - Collation of representations received;
 - Submission of Core Strategy for Examination – early March 2011;
 - Examination of Core Strategy for 3 to 4 weeks – June/July 2011;
 - Receipt of Inspectors Report – Autumn 2011;

- Adoption of the Luton and South Bedfordshire Core Strategy – end 2011.

Appendices:

None.

Note: Due to the size of the Luton and Southern Central Bedfordshire Core Strategy 2011 to 2026 – Pre Submission (November 2010) no hard copies have been circulated. However, hard copies are available for reference in the Members' Lounge and the 'hot desk' area in Ground West, Priory House. The document can also be viewed online at the following website: www.shapeyourfuture.org.uk

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

Sustainability Appraisal for the Luton and Southern Central Bedfordshire Core Strategy 2011 to 2026 – Pre-Submission (November 2010)

Consultation Statement for the Luton and Southern Central Bedfordshire Core Strategy 2011 to 2026 – Pre-Submission (November 2010)

Location of papers: www.shapeyourfuture.org.uk