

At a meeting of the **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 18 October 2012.

SCOSC/12/53 Draft Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire

The Committee were informed that in addition to the report on the draft Development Strategy a requested item had been received from Cllr Nicols and circulated to Committee Members (**Appended**). The request raised several questions relating to the draft development strategy and infrastructure requirements in the proposed urban extension North of Luton. A response to these issues was also circulated to Members of the Committee (**Appended**). To enable Members of the Committee to read and consider both the requested item and the response the meeting was adjourned.

Meeting adjourned at 11.29am and reconvened at 11.40am

Cllr Nicols raised concerns that the 4,000 homes proposed North of Luton would be provided without a 'strategic bypass' and that infrastructure would not be provided in a timely way. He suggested that rather than a new infrastructure route being provided it would be glued on to current infrastructure. Cllr Nicols commented that officers had previously indicated that there would be a spine road but that it would not be provided during the early part of the development. It was suggested that officers had also previously indicated that a mechanism for the forward funding of a strategic bypass would be designed and put in place before the housing was delivered. It was Cllr Nicols' view that a spine road/link road must be provided before the homes were delivered.

Cllr Nicols then commented on the lack of connection between the evidence base and the draft Development Strategy. Specific references were made to the absence of a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). Cllr Nicols commented that the document could not be viewed as a whole without the evidence base, which included the Sustainability Assessment, and this had not been provided at previous OSC meetings. He also commented that the draft Development Strategy referred to a transport modelling study (which did not identify the potential nature of a 'strategic' road), which had also not been available when the Committee previously considered the strategy. The response provided by officers stated that these documents had been presented to the Committee in May 2012 but Cllr Nicols stated they had not been completed until June/July 2012 so could not have been available. Cllr Nicols also stated that the evidence documents were impossible to obtain, in part due to the current structure of the planning internet pages. Cllr Nicols suggested this may have affected the consultation response to the draft Development Strategy.

Cllr Nicols felt that the draft Development Strategy was too Luton centric. The infrastructure requirements focused on what was needed for Luton but did not identify the strategic corridor for his ward. It was suggested that it had been a cut and paste job.

In summary Cllr Nicols stated that there was no evidence that a strategic bypass would be built in time and to standard for 4,000 homes North of Luton. He believed

that the homes would appear but the road would not. Cllr Nicols said that Cllr Young had previously stated that a series of connected estate roads would be provided for the development that could have a 20mph speed limit. Cllr Nicols did not consider this to be 'strategic' in nature. Cllr Nicols felt there were no means of funding the infrastructure that was needed and without the identification of an appropriate funding mechanism for a strategic road North of Luton, or the forward funding for that road, it could not be included in the Development Strategy.

In response to the issues raised by Cllr Nicols the Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy commented as follows:-

- The evidence base for the Development Strategy had evolved over time in the same way as any other plan produced in the past. At some stage the Council had to go out to public consultation in order to move things along.
- The housing trajectory fulfilled the same function as a SHLAA and this was available in the public domain.
- A compendium of background information to the Development Strategy would be helpful but it would be too large in size to print. The Council made all background documents available in public and on request.
- The Sustainability appraisal had been presented to the Sustainable Communities OSC meetings on 16 May 2012 and 11 June 2012 and Members raised specific queries relating to its content. The Sustainability Appraisal provided the basis for the public consultation.
- The Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy had not stated that the whole of the proposed road to the North of Luton would be provided upfront. It had been stated that the Council would ensure the road would be provided as whole, not that it would be delivered upfront.
- It was positive that there was one consortium of developers for the site to the North of Luton as this would assist the process of providing infrastructure contributions. Officers did not currently know the exact detail of how much a road of a strategic nature would cost but negotiations with developers were ongoing.
- It was envisaged that a strategic road would be provided across North Luton, possibly in stages as the development proceeded but the consortium of developers for this site were aware of the Council's expectations.

Cllr McVicar queried whether officers felt that development North of Luton should be removed from the strategy if a road could not be provided prior to development. Officers suggested that it would be possible to construct homes in some parts of the development without the provision of the full extent of a new road. In addition Cllr Young stated that the link road would be provided as the new estates were built. Officers had tried to provide clarity in the draft development strategy but "link road" was probably a better description of this road than "strategic bypass." Cllr Young stated it was his opinion that there had not been a fundamental change in the plan in relation to this link road. The road would be provided in its entirety across the course of the development plan but it was very unlikely that it would be provided in entirety before the homes were constructed. As an example Cllr Young stated that the first part of the development could be a rail freight interchange. This would enable a dual section of road from West of the M1 towards the East in order to link with that interchange. Further links would come forward as other parts of the development were completed. Cllr Young guessed that it would be impossible for the Council to

forward fund the length of the proposed road and that it would not be right for the Council to do this. The size of the proposed development would be sufficient to ensure the construction of the road.

In response Cllr Nicols stated that whilst he did not expect a bypass to be provided before the housing was delivered he did expect the mechanism for the funding of the road to be in place otherwise the strategy should not be agreed. He also stated that if the road was no longer considered to be a “bypass” the draft Development Strategy should be amended to reflect the change in terminology. The draft Development Strategy also referred to both a ‘spine road’ and a ‘bypass’.

In response Cllr Young stated that as a result of feedback from OSC he would consider amending the terminology from ‘bypass’ to ‘link road’ throughout the Development Strategy. In addition the Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy stated that the funding mechanism for the road would be Section 106 contributions. The preference would be to tie this into one S106 agreement but it may require several. It was stated that the Council would ensure the delivery of the entire route across the life of the plan.

Cllr Shingler commented that the M1/A6 link road should be a strategic bypass and not a series of link roads through the estates. He suggested that the link should be provided before the homes were completed. Cllr D Jones also raised concerns that the Development Strategy set out planned development up to 2031. If the road was not completed until 2031 it would be unacceptable. Cllr D Jones also commented on the need for further consideration of the combined impact of North Houghton Regis and North Luton urban extensions upon traffic in the villages. Cllr Young clarified that whilst the road would be delivered within the lifetime of the plan that did not mean it would not be delivered until 2031.

Councillor Barker stated that a significant number of homes had been proposed in the Wixams Southern Expansion area and that a masterplan for the area had identified proposals for a Country Park. Cllr Barker felt that it was critical that this Country Park be provided immediately in order to prevent the encroachment of the Wixams towards Houghton Conquest. Further clarification was also required as to how and where this park would be provided. Cllr Barker also stated that all of the comments of Houghton Conquest Parish Council had not been included in the consultation responses. Additional concerns relating to access, transport, development in Stewartby, drainage and sewerage had also been raised. In response the Strategic Planning and Housing Team Leader stated that the masterplan stage would be the appropriate time to discuss when and where a Country Park would be provided. The plan for this area included the Country Park as an essential part of the development, which should be provided at an early stage.

Councillor Aldis stated that he felt the proposed actions in response to the key issues raised in the consultation were inadequate. He also queried whether the Development Strategy would put a restriction on the types of retail development permitted in some areas and whether the Council had a definition of ‘sustainable development’. In response the Strategic Planning and Housing Team Leader stated that there was a retail policy currently in place that expressed a preference for ‘A’ class retail before other uses. This policy would be enhanced in the final strategy. Officers were

currently working through the proposed actions to the consultation responses and this would be ready for the Executive. It was agreed that a copy be circulated to Members of the Committee prior to the Executive meeting. In addition Cllr Young stated that the Council's policy in relation to backfill would be enhanced.

In addition to the comments raised by other Members the Committee discussed the following issues in detail:-

- The proposed actions to the consultation responses were inadequate and needed to be addressed prior to the Executive meeting. In the future reports should set out proposed actions in a more detailed manner.
- The terminology in the development strategy relating to the strategic bypass should be amended to read 'link road'.
- Members could not reasonably expect roads to be on the ground before homes but the Council should do its best to prevent any undue delays.
- The final version of the Development Strategy including any changes resulting from this OSC meeting should be circulated to Members of the Committee prior to the Executive meeting.
- The importance of protection for Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge.
- The need to understand the amount of additional employment that was proposed for Luton.
- The importance of supporting rural public transport and considering initiatives to share transport such as using school buses during the day.
- The importance of delivering the M1/A6 link road as it had been alluded to in other agreed plans that this route would be provided. The Council has always said that infrastructure would be provided before homes and this should be no different now. In response Cllr Young stated that the Council would not be able to fund the road itself but it would ensure the mechanism for funding this road was in place. It would not however be delivered in full before the homes were in place.
- Whether the Council could provide further clarity regarding CIL contributions for the proposed East of Leighton Linlade development. In response officers commented that they did not know how much could be achieved through CIL contributions until a charging scheme had been agreed by the Council. A detailed transport assessment had been completed for this proposed development that showed transport could cope, a link to this information could be provided to Members on request.
- Whether there had been any changes as a result of the appraisal of strategic sites and what was meant by the term "single threshold for all strategic sites across Central Bedfordshire." In response the Head of Development Planning and Housing Strategy stated that the single threshold would define what the Council considered to be a strategic site, for example the number of houses that were to be delivered. It was also stated that there had been no changes to the strategic sites as a result of the appraisal but the full plan would be available for the Executive meeting.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive consider the detailed comments of the Committee and other Members as detailed in the body of the Minutes above. These relate to the following specific issues:-

- **The need to provide more detailed actions as a result of the consultation responses.**
- **Terminology relating to the “strategic bypass” to be amended to read “link road”.**
- **The importance of the link road North of Luton being of a sufficiently strategic nature to support transport in the area.**
- **The importance of identifying an adequate funding mechanism to deliver the link road North of Luton and the need to consider whether any development in this area could be provided without the forward funding of this link road.**
- **The importance of protecting Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge.**
- **The importance of supporting rural public transport.**
- **The need to set out in full the outcomes of the appraisal of strategic sites.**
- **The importance of appropriate evidence being made available on which to base decisions relating to the suitability of the Development Strategy.**
- **The need to understand the combined impact of North Houghton Regis and North Luton urban extensions upon traffic in the villages.**
- **The importance of immediately delivering a Country Park in order to prevent the encroachment of the Wixams towards Houghton Conquest.**
- **The need to amend policies in relation to retail provision and backfill to ensure they were of sufficient strength.**

Note: Councillors Murray and Saunders both left the meeting during consideration of this item and were not present when the recommendations were agreed.