

Central Bedfordshire Council

Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee 17th March 2016

The Environmental Framework

Advising Officers:

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Purpose of this report

1. The purpose of the Environmental Framework is to provide an overview of the existing local environmental evidence base, which is made up of studies, associated strategies and plans. The Environmental Framework will also demonstrate how the Council meets a range of requirements associated with national policy and legislation, whilst also providing the framework for how this local evidence base can be used to inform and shape future policy and action.
2. The Environmental Framework is being consulted to support the preparation of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan. The consultation asks stakeholders for their views on how we should reflect national policy and the local evidence base in the local plan through a series of general and topic based questions.
3. This report provides the Committee with opportunity to comment on the draft of this document and contribute to this consultation.
4. The Environmental Framework also provides the Council with the opportunity to demonstrate the value of our environment, and set out the range of opportunities to protect and enhance it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

1. Consider the draft document and recommend that Executive endorse this document as technical guidance for the provision of interpretation of the Council's environmental evidence base. This is in relation to a range of functions including strategic planning and development management purposes.

Background context

5. The Central Bedfordshire area has valued and a very high quality environment and landscape. This is described, assessed and prioritised through the wide range of evidence studies, guidance, strategies and plans the Council (often in partnership with others) has produced. These cover on a range of specific areas, features and topics.

What is the Environmental Framework?

6. The Environmental Framework:
 - a. Provides a summary of a range of existing plans, strategies, assessments and reports, covering various aspects of the environment.
 - b. It sets these aspects of the environment in the context of relevant national policy and legislation.
 - c. Provides a summary and interpretation of key points from the various plans, strategies etc.
7. The studies, assessments, guidance and plans summarised in the Environmental Framework are important documents in their own right, being currently used to help in determine planning applications and will shape future planning policy.

What the Environmental Framework does?

8. By providing this overview of the existing local evidence base, with associated strategies and plans, the Environmental Framework demonstrates how the Council meets a range of requirements associated with national policy and legislation, this includes:
 1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF);
 2. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act;
 3. The Climate Change Act;
 4. The Habitats Directive;
 5. The Water Framework Directive; and
 6. The Flood and Water Management Act.
9. As this national policy and legislation is regularly amended or reinterpreted, having an overview of this in the Environmental Framework, which can be easily updated, helps clarify the Council's understanding of what is required and more importantly the implications of the when applied to the local environmental evidence base.

How will the Environmental Framework be used?

10. The Environmental Framework has a number of functions, these include, but are not limited to :
 - a. Providing the environmental evidence base for the new Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire.
 - b. Interpreting what the local evidence base means with respect to national policy and clarifying how this information is used.

- c. Informing development management decisions.
- d. Providing an environmental evidence base for other future Council plans and strategies

Council Priorities

11. The Environmental Framework supports all of the Council's priorities, with the most relevant being:
 - enhancing your local community – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

12. The Environmental Framework reflects how a number of legislative and national policy requirements would be applied in Central Bedfordshire, in light of the environmental information the Council hold. The focus of this largely relates to planning policy, in relation to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as well as other legal requirements detailed in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act, the Climate Change Act, the Habitats Directive, the Water Framework Directive and the Flood and Water Management Act.

Financial Implications

13. The Environmental Framework does not require any budget so there are therefore no financial implications.

Equalities Implications

14. None.

Sustainability Implications

15. The Environmental Framework will ensure that the wealth of environmental information the Council holds is made best use of in order to deliver sustainable development.

Conclusion and next Steps

16. Comments are currently being sought on the Environmental Framework from key stakeholders and other environmental organisations, asking for their views on how the local evidence base detailed within the framework can be used to shape and provide the focus for future policy and action.
17. Once completed, the outcomes of this process will be used to shape environmental policies in the new Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire.
18. The Environmental Framework will then be taken to Executive for endorsement as technical guidance as Council's environmental

evidence base. This is in relation to a range of functions including strategic planning and development management purposes.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Environmental Framework

The following Appendix is attached / provided through an electronic link:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/environment/natural-environment/default.aspx>