

Agenda Item: 7

Meeting: Executive

Date: 23 June 2009

Subject: Luton and South Bedfordshire Local Development Framework : Core Strategy – Preferred Options

Report of: Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development

Summary: To consider the Preferred Options for the Luton and South Bedfordshire Local Development Framework Core Strategy and respond to the consultation accordingly.

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities

Contact Officer: Richard Fox,

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Executive

Key Decision Yes

**Reason for urgency/
exemption from call-in** The Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Technical Unit's deadline for responses expires on 12 June. An extension to this deadline has been granted to enable the Executive to consider the Preferred Options. This decision is therefore urgent and exempt from call-in as any delay caused by the call-in process could result in the Council's views not being taken into account and prejudice the Council's interest.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. that the Executive support the Luton and South Bedfordshire Core Strategy Preferred Options.**

Reason for Recommendations: The Preferred Options will provide for the growth requirements of the Luton and South Bedfordshire Area in the most sustainable way.

Background

1. The former Bedfordshire County Council, Luton Borough Council and former South Bedfordshire Council agreed to work together on formulating the planning and transportation policies required to deliver the Government's sustainable communities agenda for the Luton and South Bedfordshire growth area. It was necessary to establish two joint committees to fulfil these functions; a Section 29 Committee under the Planning and Compulsory

Purchase Act 2004 to develop the 'planning' aspects and a Section 101(5) committee under the Local Government Act 1972 to perform the Executive function of the preparation of the Local Transport Plan.

2. The Section 29 Joint Committee was formally established by statutory instrument in June 2007, although it had been in existence and operating since November 2005. The Committee was charged with the production of the joint Local Development Framework (LDF) for the two administrative areas.
3. Local Government Review in Bedfordshire required amendments to be made to the statutory provisions and constitutional arrangements to enable the continuation of joint working focussed on the designated growth area. These arrangements were agreed by the Central Bedfordshire Shadow Executive on 16 December 2008.
4. The Joint Technical Unit, comprising planning officers from Luton and Central Bedfordshire has been working on the LDF for Luton and the area formerly covered by South Bedfordshire Council. Forward planning for the remainder of Central Bedfordshire is carried out by the LDF team at Chicksands. Whilst the Luton and South Bedfordshire Core Strategy is being prepared by Central Bedfordshire planning officers, both Luton Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Councils are statutory consultees on the document and the consultation exercise could be flawed without seeking the views of the host authorities. This is the purpose of this report.

Luton and South Bedfordshire Core Strategy

5. The Core Strategy is one of the Local Development Documents (LDDs) that are part of the LDF. The Core Strategy is a strategic level document providing the spatial vision and principles to be built upon in later, in more detailed, parts of the LDF. These will expand on the principles of the spatial vision and principles of the Core Strategy and will include detailed policy guidance to enable specific decisions on planning applications to be made.
6. In 2007 a consultation exercise was undertaken on the Core Strategy Issues and Options Paper which set out various strategic spatial options to secure the implementation of the growth allocated to this area. The Preferred Options document represents the next stage in the process and sets out preferred policy approaches for delivering this growth through a spatial vision and set of spatial principles, taking into account different technical evidence streams, public consultation responses and sustainability appraisal findings. The document aims to set out broad policy approaches and outline the processes undertaken to reach them. It is not meant to include the precise policy wording that the final Core Strategy will contain, this is anticipated in late 2009.

The Preferred Options

7. The Luton and South Bedfordshire Core Strategy Preferred Options Summary Document is appended. It sets out the spatial development strategy for the area and associated policy. The Government's growth agenda requires that significant new development is delivered in this area. The key objectives of the Preferred Options include 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 three preferred urban extensions are north of Houghton Regis, delivering around 7,000 homes, north of Luton providing 4,000 homes and east of Leighton Buzzard delivering approximately 2,500 homes. The Joint Committee also propose that 5,500 homes should be provided to the east of Luton in North Hertfordshire. The full document can be viewed at www.shapeyourfuture.org.uk.

Consultation Response

8. The location of new development across the southern part of Central Bedfordshire District and Luton Borough will have a major impact on sustainability. By integrating the provision of new development including, homes, employment and social/community infrastructure uses with high quality public transport, particularly in the form of the Luton and Dunstable Guided Busway, this will help to shape both new development and future travel patterns in a highly sustainable way. Taking an integrated approach to the provision of new development and its associated sustainable transport linkages is probably the most powerful way in which the planning system can contribute to environmental sustainability as well as sustainable communities generally.
9. The Milton Keynes South Midlands Sub Regional Strategy (MKSMSRS) and the East of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) allocate significant growth to this area; the former also identifies areas of search for potential Green Belt review in order to accommodate sustainable strategic urban extensions. Generally speaking the areas of search for such urban extensions lie to the north-west, and north of Dunstable, north of Houghton Regis and Luton, east of Luton (in North Hertfordshire District) and around Leighton Buzzard and Linslade.
10. These areas of search have been investigated further in the preparation of the Core Strategy and two preferred strategic urban extensions on the northern fringe of the main conurbation have emerged. Additionally, one smaller scale strategic urban extension is preferred to the east of Leighton Buzzard. A further preferred direction of growth has been identified. This lies to east of the main conurbation and mostly lies in North Hertfordshire District. The North Hertfordshire District Local Development Framework will progress the planning of this growth with the Joint Committee inputting where and when appropriate. The MKSMSRS and the RSS also set out a sub-regional approach to the

delivery of urban regeneration, transport and the safeguarding of rural areas from inappropriate development.

11. This Core Strategy develops the regional and sub-regional approach at the next level by setting out a spatial approach to the delivery of sustainable growth across southern Bedfordshire up to 2031 in a timely way that meets the needs of all in the area now and in the future. The Growth area is defined as comprising the main conurbation of Luton, Dunstable and Houghton Regis, and the market town of Leighton Buzzard and Linslade, together with any preferred urban extensions of these settlements. It is also likely that some appropriately scaled growth will go to main rural settlements.
12. The first choice location for growth related development is within existing urban areas thereby making full use of previously developed land and buildings. This approach will ensure these areas remain vibrant in decades to come. Priority will be given to the main conurbation before Leighton Buzzard and Linslade owing to its higher levels of existing and potential sustainability and to maximise the opportunities for new development to support and enable its regeneration.
13. However in the light of the amount of growth Luton and southern Bedfordshire needs to accommodate up to 2031 not all of it can be accommodated within existing urban areas. The evidence demonstrates that concentrating development that cannot be accommodated within existing urban areas in urban extensions is the most sustainable strategic spatial strategy approach to pursue. This approach enables the new development to benefit from all that the existing urban areas have to offer, including public transport, whilst at the same time being of direct regenerative benefit to those same existing urban areas. Growth of the main conurbation in the east of the Growth Area in this way offers the opportunity for the most sustainable urban extensions generally thereby enhancing the overall pattern of sustainability for the growth area as a whole.
14. The evidence demonstrates the need to consolidate and develop Luton as the sub-regional centre serving southern Bedfordshire and adjoining areas. The spatial strategy is accordingly orientated towards this objective. It is also important to safeguard the future of Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Houghton Regis town centres. The evidence illustrates the significant role these subsidiary centres play in serving their local communities which also need to be nurtured. To this end the Core Strategy seeks to allocate appropriate levels of commercial and other development in these centres to ensure their continued vibrancy.
15. It is important to ensure that the rural settlements of the Growth Area continue to meet the local needs of the communities they serve. The Core Strategy seeks to ensure this happens by identifying such settlements where appropriately scaled development potential may exist.

16. In order to safeguard the countryside, the evidence shows it is appropriate for the Core Strategy to limit development outside those principal settlements referred to above. The reason for this are three fold:

To ensure the most sustainable pattern of development is delivered;

To help support and secure the regeneration of existing areas; and

To protect the countryside.

- 17 Associated with this is the need to ensure that the recast Green Belt, with its new boundaries following the provision of land for urban extensions, has a defined role.

Conclusion

18. It is considered that the Preferred Options deliver the required growth levels for the area in the most sustainable way and should be supported for these reasons.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Delivery of the Local Development Framework is a statutory duty of the Council.

Financial:

None

Legal:

The Core Strategy when adopted will be part of the statutory development plan for the area.

Risk Management:

Failure to support the Preferred Options may lead to delay and uncertainty in the preparation of the Core Strategy and make the Council potentially vulnerable to unwelcome planning applications.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

None

Equalities/Human Rights:

An equality impact assessment has been undertaken as part of the development of the framework in order to ensure that the needs of local communities are fully understood in relation to the provision of new development including, homes, employment and social/community infrastructure and public transport. The engagement process is in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement and will allow monitoring of responses to be analysed in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and disability.

Community Safety:

This is a theme considered in the Preferred Options.

Sustainability:

Sustainability is an overarching consideration in the preparation of the Core Strategy

Appendices:

Appendix A – Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Committee Core Strategy :
Preferred Options Summary Document

Background papers (open to public inspection)

Location of papers: Priory House, Chicksands