

Luton & South Bedfordshire Joint Committee

Thursday 29 November 2007

Agenda Item No. 6

AUTHOR	Joint Officer Team (Mark Saccoccio)
SUBJECT	SCOPING THE CORE STRATEGY ISSUES, GENERATING OPTIONS AND GETTING TO THE CORE STRATEGY PREFERRED OPTION
PURPOSE	To set out for Members consideration and decision, the methods for progressing to a Core Strategy preferred option.
RECOMMENDATIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the list of issues in Appendix 1 of the report at Item 5 on the Agenda be noted for use in generating and evaluating options.2. That the Joint Technical Unit convenes a series of Luton & South Bedfordshire Growth Area Planning Stakeholder Forums reporting to the Members' Steering Group.3. That the Joint Committee calls a Luton & South Beds Growth Area Enquiry, explicitly aimed at achieving consensus upon a preferred option.
REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To achieve a 'sound' Core Strategy, the Joint Committee should satisfy itself that it has considered all significant development issues in its forthcoming evaluation of options.2. The gathering, assimilation and presentation of the technical evidence to generate and test options are vital to deciding upon the preferred option. This requires the Joint Technical Unit to work intensively with planning staff across a wide range of services, delivery partners, infrastructure companies and developers.3. The Joint Committee needs to commit to a process for deciding the preferred option. A Luton & South Bedfordshire Growth Area Enquiry would provide an open and structured way of making that decision.

1.0 INTRODUCTION - DEVELOPING THE GROWTH AREA VISION AND OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 The main change for local planning authorities in the new Local Development Framework is that planning documents now have to be based on a spatial option, built on a consensus of stakeholders. This requires a far higher level of political will and technical co-ordination than in previous approaches to planning. Consensus on a preferred option can only be built on the firm base of a shared and developed vision, and set of planning objectives for the development of the Luton & South Bedfordshire Growth Area. A clear vision and set of objectives provide the criteria and the metrics for the generation and evaluation of options.
- 1.2 The gaining of a consensus on the vision for development is both desirable and necessary to avoid costly challenges and adversarial disputes. Clarity is needed where objectives may conflict, for example between new homes and existing employment uses, or housing the needs of urban areas in the countryside.
- 1.3 However, achieving consensus in the Luton & South Bedfordshire Growth Area has to be around how best to deliver over 26,000 new homes by 2021, safeguard land for a further 15,400 homes up to 2031 and 23,000 jobs up to 2021 with a further 12,000 jobs to 2031. A consensus around minimum change, or minor adjustments to the present settlement pattern, would therefore only serve to block growth, and would not achieve the purpose of providing the homes and jobs that future residents and in-migrants require.
- 1.4 The challenge set by our growth targets is to complete one new home and one new job approximately every working hour from 2011 to 2021. This is over twice the highest build rate for new housing ever achieved in the UK, in the past 30 years. However, these are the given development objectives.
- 1.5 There are also many other national and regional planning objectives that can be taken as given. For example, the Code for Sustainable Homes will require nearly all new homes built in the Luton & South Bedfordshire Growth Area to meet the building standards of *Level 5 or Level 6* in the Code. Yet no one knows if compliance with these standards is both achievable and economically viable. Individual demonstration houses have been built but, as yet, no new community based on *Level 5 or Level 6* is at an advanced stage of planning.
- 1.6 To meet, just these, given objectives will require new communities to be planned in an integrated manner, the like of which has not previously been achieved. For example, the skills and jobs required to produce all materials, elements and services for a new home every hour, would need to be both local and competitive to meet environmental sustainability targets. Fortunately, the Luton & South

Bedfordshire Growth Area has such potential skills and manufacturing capacity. However, the planning of new communities, from the underground infrastructure upwards, will require a level of detailed thinking that calls for experimentation, testing of standards and creative approaches to design.

- 1.7 The South Beds Local Strategic Partnership has held one-day 'summits' of key stakeholders on the themes of 'Avoiding Gridlock – Planning for Growth and Sustainable Transport' and 'Does Business Have a Future in this Area?' These have helped to raise the need for local leadership and direction in progressing key issues, such as tackling congestion and where to locate new employment areas.
- 1.8 We now need to demonstrate, in physical terms, aspects of the growth vision, showing what is, and by default, what is not, achievable.
- 1.9 The vision for development of the Luton & South Bedfordshire Growth Area, therefore, needs plan-making in the form of the Local Development Framework, to be progressed at the same time as physical delivery. The generation and evaluation of planning options will need to be demonstrated and given meaning by experimentation, innovation and testing of new and different methods of delivery.
- 1.10 While the future Local Delivery Vehicle's purpose will be to make delivery of growth happen, it is the Joint Committee's responsibility, through the Local Development Framework, to spell out its chosen method of delivery, in order to implement its preferred option. Hence, planning and delivery should go side-by-side working to the same vision and objectives.

2.0 CAPTURING ALL OF THE DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

- 2.1 Appendix 1 of the report under Item 5 of the Agenda is a summary of the key, statutory and significant public responses from the recent consultation exercise. A full schedule of responses and officers' comments will be presented to a future meeting, but the Appendix does provide sufficient evidence for the Joint Committee to assess the extent to which the issues in the 'Core Strategy – Issues and Options Paper' need amendment or addition.
- 2.2 Approximately 2,000 responses were received from organisations and individuals. Although concerns were expressed at the last meeting of the Joint Committee at the apparent low percentage of the resident population this represents, the number, range and quality of responses is of the order expected, due to:
 - the complex and abstract nature of planning for the future;
 - the lengthy and complex response forms required to be completed;
 - and

- the lack of any physical manifestation of what 'growth' in the Luton & South Bedfordshire Growth Area means, and what it might look like.

2.3 As would be expected, there are many concerns expressed from respondents, arising from uncertainties and fears generally for the future.

3.0 **EVIDENCE TO DEFINE ISSUES, GENERATE OPTIONS AND EVALUATE THEM**

3.1 The role of officers in getting to a preferred option is to gather, assimilate, interpret and present key evidence for the public and decision makers to evaluate and select options.

3.2 *The Housing Trajectory*, or land supply forecasting, is being tested to see how available and deliverable the sites are listed within it. More detailed information is being collected from owners and developers on each site. Once completed, early in the New Year, the Joint Committee will be able to start evaluation of the number of urban extensions needed and to consider issues of phasing, in relation to other evidence on infrastructure delivery.

3.3 *Environmental Studies*, including landscape assessments, green infrastructure and green belt analysis, are at differing stages of progress. Sufficient evidence is available for strategic consideration of options for growth, transport, employment and green space, but additional, finer-grained work may be needed in the evaluation of specific locational choices.

3.4 *The Employment Land Study* is reported elsewhere on this agenda. It provides a useful baseline for evaluation of a range of spatial options for new employment land.

3.5 *The Transport Assessment Model* should be completed by March 2008 and allow for the testing of a selection of transport options and spatial choices for new housing and transport areas. However, the wider range of options for housing and employment to be tested, the more costly will be the evaluation.

3.6 *Resource Efficiency (Infrastructure) and Water Cycle Studies* are to be commissioned as soon as funding allows. The option of an integrated infrastructure planning approach to the planning and delivery of both the urban extensions and, where possible, existing urban areas, will be evaluated.

3.7 *Community Facilities Evidence* is starting to be built up and will continue with all public service providers being requested to engage with the Growth Area Planning Stakeholder Forums in the New Year.

- 3.8 The Luton & South Bedfordshire Growth Area is fortunate in already attracting strong developer interest, and part of building a consensus around a preferred option will be the sharing and agreeing of evidence with developers and third parties. The proposed framework for this is to be set out in a Growth Area Charter for Planning Performance Agreements, which is the subject of a separate report on the Agenda. However, a series of 'Developers' Forum' meetings will be held, starting early in the New Year.
- 3.9 For officers to assimilate and present the evidence to members, a series of Growth Area Planning Stakeholder meetings is proposed, probably on a monthly basis between January and May 2008. The purpose of these meetings will be to review the evidence base, test assumptions and options in the light of the evidence and identify gaps for further work.
- 3.10 The meetings will involve the technical and operational planners of stakeholder organisations and statutory consultees included in the Statement of Community Involvement, but not community organisations, at this stage. The action points from the meetings could be reported to the Members' Steering Group and incorporated into reports to the Joint Committee.

4.0 BUILDING UPON THE 'CORE STRATEGY – ISSUES AND OPTIONS PAPER'

- 4.1 The 'Core Strategy – Issues and Options Paper' resulted from a process of structured discussions around planning process at the Senior Managers' Group and the Members' Steering Group, following delegation by the Joint Committee. This process and the draft paper itself was considered and approved by the Joint Committee.
- 4.2 The Joint Committee now needs to move as quickly as possible to evaluation and selection of a preferred set of options. This can only be done by achieving consensus on a vision for the Luton & South Bedfordshire Growth Area. The vision in the 'Issues and Options Paper' is worthy and general. We need a vision that is much more specific and is the product of debate and consideration by a wide range of local people, informed by the best technical advice. Members, planners, developers and the public will need to arrive at a consensus on such a vision with local objectives, in line with national policies.

5.0 GROWTH AREA ENQUIRY

- 5.1 To meet the timetable in the Local Development Scheme, the Joint Committee will need to have resolved its preferred option, or set of options, by June 2008. The Members' Steering Group, in considering methods for evaluation and deciding upon options, expressed a preference for a public event at which a line is drawn on consideration and a decision is taken. The event, with a suggested working title of

‘Growth Area Enquiry’, is to be planned for a week that does not clash with any major local events or school holidays.

- 5.2 The aim of the enquiry is not only to build consensus on a vision and option for growth, employment, travel and green space, but also to promote what the growth area will provide for our existing communities.
- 5.3 The Growth Area Enquiry will be held by Members, on behalf of the Joint Committee, who will call stakeholder representatives, officers and developers to present to them evidence for supporting options and for testing and evaluating them. The Growth Area Enquiry will have no other status than that given to it by the Joint Committee. The Members holding the Enquiry will then present the preferred option to the Joint Committee for approval.
- 5.4 All activities, meetings and discussions that comprise the event will be in public, providing the opportunity to raise issues and questions at selected times. It is important that the Growth Area Enquiry is seen as the means of achieving consensus among stakeholders and developers, and that issues raised by individuals are noted but not responded to at the time.
- 5.5 The preparation and facilitation of such an event will be detailed and thorough, and begin as soon as possible from Members approval to staging it. The venue will need to have one large room, exhibition space and various ‘break-out’ rooms.
- 5.6 The following is put forward to provide an idea of the range of activities such an event could include:

Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enquiry receives Developers Forum presentation of options with range of alternatives, drawing out key policy issues - Planning Stakeholder Forum works up options for presentation and exhibition - Public Exhibition of Developers’ Forum and Planning Stakeholder Forum options - Public Meeting - ‘Growth - What’s in it for us and our children?’ - nationally recognised panel and discussion
Day 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planning Stakeholder Forum presents its evaluation of options to the Enquiry - Decision Analysis - revisiting the vision and objectives - facilitated workshops of Enquiry and stakeholders - Reflection and consideration - review of evidence by Enquiry - Stakeholders called in as required, otherwise conducting a ‘Planning for Real’ exercise with school students
Day 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint Committee meet at which Enquiry presents its decision for approval - Public Meeting - ‘Making Growth Happen’ - presentation

	of preferred options; developing the preferred option Evaluation of Enquiry - have we got a consensus?
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6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There is no specific provision within the current Joint Committee budget for a Growth Area Enquiry. However, there is some provision within the overall consultation and consultant budgets that could readily and properly be used as the Joint Committee's contribution to match any funding from developers and government. Subject to Member support, a resource plan will be drawn up and brought to the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

7.0 HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The work of co-ordinating the Developers and Planning Stakeholder Forums should be the responsibility of the Joint Technical Unit, as both of these activities are essential to the progression of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. A small core team is being set up, in a location independent of any council partner, in order to provide focus on these and other critical work streams.

8.0 ASSESSMENT OF RISKS

- 8.1 The advantages of the proposed approach to getting to a preferred option are a concentrated focus; high energy & intensity of discussion and debate; and a structured approach, but enabling creativity. The Growth Area Enquiry would promote growth and the work of the Joint Technical Unit and the Joint Committee, with a high profile of local attention, and the activities are very transparent and open to public scrutiny.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 An innovatory approach to plan-making should attract considerable local attention. The Growth Area Enquiry, along with an open, but structured process of debate for building consensus around constructing new communities, should bring the Luton & South Bedfordshire Growth Area to wider, local attention.
- 9.2 The Growth Area Enquiry would demonstrate real community leadership by the Joint Committee, and assist greatly in building consensus, making decisions on growth options and moving quickly towards a Core Strategy.