

Luton & South Bedfordshire Joint Committee

29 February 2008

Agenda Item No. 7

AUTHOR	Joint Officer Team (Tony Pierce)
SUBJECT	GETTING TO A 'PREFERRED OPTIONS CORE STRATEGY'
PURPOSES	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Set out the approach and methods of involving stakeholders in the testing of options to arrive at a preferred set of options for the Core Strategy.2. Inform Joint Committee of the key events and milestones in the production of the Core Strategy. In summary, these are:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Forum and Member Enquiry (May 2008)• Publication of draft preferred options (June 2008)• Submission of Core Strategy (November 2008)
RECOMMENDATIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Approve the approach to deciding upon the preferred set of options;2. Approve the proposed events and activities leading up to the submission of a Core Strategy to the Secretary of State, as set out in Appendix 1 and3. Request the Local Strategic Partnerships to consider and comment on the draft objectives, set out in Appendix 2.
REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS	Ensure clarity of direction to and agreement upon the process for producing the Core Strategy.

Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of setting out preferred options for the Core Strategy is to show a clear audit trail of evidence in building community support and consensus for the spatial strategy.

- 1.2 This involves starting with what are the “givens”; use of the Sustainability Appraisal process; working with key service delivery partners and tackling the hard decisions first. The spatial options then become much easier, as do the development management policies. We must also self-assess the soundness of the options.
- 1.3 As part of testing the soundness of our approach, we need to review our capacity to deliver the Local Development Framework, whether we have sufficient resources in place; an effective project management system; political commitment; corporate awareness and joint working.

Building Community Support and Consensus

- 2.1 The Issues and Options Paper included 10 spatial options for growth; two options on density of development; two options on coalescence with villages; two options on employment; three options for the Luton northern bypass; four options for the Woodside Connection; travel choices; three options for the town centres; three options for affordable homes; four options for renewable energy; five choices for open spaces and three options for gypsies and travellers provision. Mathematically, these options could be combined in over 2 million different ways, although we should only consider those that are reasonable and are within 'given' constraints. Public consultation responses reflect preferences between options and may put forward other reasonable alternatives.
- 2.2 The process of building stakeholder support, convergence and consensus helps to narrow down the range of options. This requires discussion around shared vision, objectives, evaluation criteria and how to apply them to the evidence base. This helps to generate and refine options.
- 2.3 The most usual technique in assessing and testing options is through workshops involving stakeholders. This is to test the practicality and deliverability of the options. In addition, sustainability appraisal on the options also provides good evidence in the reasonableness and soundness of options.

What Are the “Givens”?

- 2.4 These are the national and regional planning policies and growth and jobs targets from the East of England Regional Plan and Milton Keynes & South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy. They have been used to help generate the options set out in the 'Issues and Options' paper. They also assist in evaluation of options.
- 2.5 The agreed vision for the growth area and spatial objectives provide the evaluation criteria for both sustainability appraisals and testing of the options. Refinement of the vision and the spatial planning objectives of the Core Strategy are, therefore, the first steps in getting to an agreed set of preferred options.
- 2.6 The LSPs will need to work together over the next month or so to ratify or amend the vision in the Issues and Options Paper and to consider, amend and agree the set of objectives. A draft is attached as the starting point for this.

Sustainability Appraisals

- 3.1 A sustainability appraisal of the options in the Issues and Options Paper is being commissioned to assist in narrowing down the range of options outlined.

- 3.2 Once Members Steering Group has agreed on a set of reasonable options, further sustainability appraisal will form part of the evaluation. This will be commissioned in April from consultants for delivery prior to the Community Forum.

Tackling the Hard Decisions

- 4.1 The generation of spatial options and their evaluation will require member direction on some unpopular issues that may be politically sensitive or contentious. The process for this and the current level of member engagement of the three partner councils is through the Members Steering Group of the Joint Committee to meetings of the Joint Committee itself.

- 4.2 These hard policy issues include:-

- Confirming the level of growth in housing and jobs achievable for 2021 and 2031
- Gypsies and travellers
- Options for town centres
- Options for number and phasing of urban extensions
- Options for new employment land
- Green belt roll-back
- Sustainable development in rural areas
- Integrated transport options

Officers will bring forward evidence to each of the forthcoming meetings of the Members Steering Group to get direction on these issues. This will help to clarify options.

The Core Strategy – Preferred Options

- 5.1 The preferred options should address :

- The range of reasonable options considered issue by issue
- A summary review of evidence
- Criteria used for evaluation of options
- General directions for growth
- Locational options for development
- Preferred locational options
- Draft policies for managing development

Spatial Options and Allocations

- 6.1 The total land take for growth can be evidenced by the studies on housing land, employment land and green infrastructure. However, the extent, form and location of spatial allocations will be determined largely by tackling the hard decisions. Preferred options will include only major allocations. However, work on the Spatial Allocations DPD will need to progress in parallel with preparation of the Submission Core Strategy. This is to ensure there are no conflicts between the two documents and the full implications of the Core Strategy to be illustrated.

- 6.2 However, the draft that will be available in June 2008 of the Preferred Options document will have only major allocations, where spatial options are clear and no

further evidence work is needed. Evidence work, particularly on infrastructure studies, will continue over the Summer and Autumn of 2008, at which time a draft for submission to the Secretary of State will be prepared with all of the major allocations.

Development Management Policies

- 7.1 Development management is an emerging new term for what has been known as development control, but reflecting the shift in emphasis in planning for wider community concerns than just land use. Recent government guidance and best practice indicate that the method of delivery for the Core Strategy is a requirement and that this should include generic and, possibly, area specific development management policies. These could also include proposals to use Local Development Orders for certain types of development, linked to design codes. They need not be complex, but should clarify how the planning authorities intend to deliver the Core Strategy. A subsequent Development Control DPD is included in the Local Development Scheme for submission in May 2009.
- 7.2 Key development management policies, particularly those that affect land take on new development, such as housing density and parking, should be worked up in conjunction with options for the Core Strategy. More detailed standards can be drafted later.

Working with Key Service Delivery Partners

- 8.1 The Sustainable Community Strategies for Luton and South Bedfordshire will be well advanced by the process of involving service delivery partners in evaluating options for the spatial strategy. This will be done through a series of workshops starting on 18 February 2008. The key areas of work for these workshops will be:-
- Identification of the infrastructure deficit in the growth area
 - The standards of provision so that the development of new communities will help remedy the existing deficit
 - Evaluation of options for models of service delivery and their spatial impacts e.g. public service villages, neighbourhood 'hubs' and relation to town centres
- 8.2 As regards utilities, a series of 1:1 meetings is proposed for as soon as practical, in conjunction with studies being commissioned. Similarly, the social and community facilities study being commissioned needs to be part of a consolidated partnership approach, ideally led by service delivery partners.

Assessment of Risks

- 9.1 Current capacity issues have been addressed by the creation of the Joint Committee, an agreed budget and commitment to the creation of a Joint Technical Team to support the Joint Committee.
- 9.2 However, putting these resources into place has taken longer than originally anticipated.
- 9.3 The prime risk to achieving the next stage of the Local Development Framework is, therefore, still capacity.

- 9.4 Member engagement in the process is strong and community engagement is sufficient. Corporate understanding and commitment is also evident in the three council partners, although there are issues still to be resolved in aligning the Local Development Framework with the Sustainable Community Strategies of the partner councils. The spatial options will need testing against the objectives and any delivery models promoted by the three Sustainable Community Strategies.
- 9.5 There is a risk, however, in making time for engagement of stakeholders in seeking consensus, when convergence is far more realistic. The critical events list in Appendix 1 includes workshops with delivery partners and developers to mitigate this risk and make the best use of time remaining.
- 9.6 The eventual adoption of the recent draft guidance from Communities and Local Government on *Streamlining Development Frameworks* may impact on the Local Development Scheme and work programme.
- 9.7 A further risk is that the plan-led approach to growth is undermined by development decisions on major housing applications made at appeal. The vital evidence of housing supply and the phasing of sites currently allocated, particularly in Luton is critical to managing this risk.

10. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The proposed Community Forum provides a specific focus for groups to put forward views in a welcoming environment. The adopted Statement of Community Involvement sets out the steps and measures taken in publishing a Local Development Framework document to ensure it is done in an inclusive manner.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The costs of the events listed in Appendix 1 total approximately £60,000 and the production of the documentation for the Core Strategy can be contained within budgets previously reported to the Joint Committee and contributions approved by the partner councils. The timely production of Core Strategy documentation is essential for the partner councils to meet the milestones listed in the Local Development Scheme. The extent to which these milestones will be met will affect future Government Housing and Planning Delivery Grant to each council.

These implications were agreed by the senior accountant on 19 February 2008.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The progress and enactment of the Planning and Reform Bill, currently going through Parliament, and the publication of new Government policy guidance on Local Development Frameworks may impact on the process and requirements, particularly for consultation upon the Core Strategy.

These implications were agreed by the principal solicitor on 18 February 2008.