

Luton & South Bedfordshire Joint Committee

19th September 2008

Agenda Item No. 11

AUTHOR	Director of Environment (BCC)
SUBJECT	Review of East of England Plan.
PURPOSE	To inform the Group about the proposals for the review of the East of England Plan.
RECOMMENDATION	That the report is noted.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report outlines the proposals for the review of the East of England Plan and identifies the implications for the Section 4(4) Authorities.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The East of England Plan was published by the Secretary of State in May. It sets out a development strategy for the region up to 2021 and provides the framework for local authorities in the preparation of local development documents and local transport plans.
- 2.2 In July the Regional Planning Panel (RPP) considered a new Project Plan and draft statement of public participation for the Review of the East of England Plan. The Project Plan defines what the Review will comprise, the process that will be followed and the timetable for completion of the Review. It is intended to submit the Plan to the Secretary of State by the end of 2009.
- 2.3 The Project Plan is currently out for consultation with a response deadline of 15th September 2008. Following this, a formal request will be issued by EERA for advice of the Section 4(4) Authorities (Counties and Unitaries) between October 2008 and January 2009. Consultation on the options will follow in late spring 2009.
- 2.4 The draft request for Section 4(4) advice refers to two principal areas of work: formal advice on specific sub regional policies for parts of the respective Authorities' areas and to lead on assessing growth and regeneration needs in their areas and in relation to cross boundary issues. In essence, the tasks for Section 4(4) Authorities are to: provide advice generally on the Review; advise on the range of technical studies that are in progress or about to be commissioned (i.e. regional settlements; invitation to developers to submit proposals); advise on any

policy within the existing RSS which might or might not need changing; advise on whether any part of the authority's area is considered to need sub-regional policies in the Plan; and undertake sub-regional work to identify spatial strategies to deliver as yet unspecified housing growth levels, defined by district. The work will involve testing the spatial implications of the National Housing and Planning Advisory Unit's (NHPAU) range of housing scenarios, assessing how these numbers could be accommodated and advising on the consequences of accommodating such numbers. Section 4(4) Authorities will also be expected to consult and facilitate discussion on these matters with all relevant authorities and stakeholders, with specific emphasis on the engagement of District Councils in two tier areas.

3.0 Specific issues.

3.1 The timetable for undertaking this work is very challenging and is already under pressure as a result of the legal challenges to the adopted East of England Plan. Section 4(4) Authorities will be expected to provide their advice to EERA by January 2009. The programme of technical work is being compressed at the beginning of the Review exercise in order to meet the government's deadline for the Plan to be Adopted by Autumn/Winter 2010. There is unlikely to be adequate time to properly consider all the relevant issues in this limited period. In addition, given the running down of strategic planning capacity in county and unitary authorities following the abolition of structure plans, this places considerable demands on the Section 4(4) Authorities and it is likely that additional capacity will have to be sought e.g. by commissioning technical work from external consultants.

3.2 At the time of preparing this report it is considered that the County Council's response will include the following:

- Concern about the challenging timetable, particularly in the light of current strategic planning capacity in the County Council.
- Notwithstanding the above, the County Council will seek to provide as much of the requested advice as possible before January 2009, but it is inevitable that some material will have to be provided later.
- The particular circumstances in Bedfordshire where Local Government re-organisation will result in changes to the Section 4(4) Authorities (see 3.3 below) need to be taken into account.

3.3 In Bedfordshire there are additional issues arising from the Government's decision to abolish the current two-tier structure of local government and create two unitary authorities. Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire will become Section 4(4) Authorities in April 2009 and it is therefore important that the existing Borough/District Councils are fully engaged at the outset in order that the new Authorities can fully assume their responsibilities in April 2009. In order to help achieve this it is proposed that the Borough and District Councils work

closely with the County Council (and Luton Borough Council) from the outset and this process has already begun at officer level. The advice from the Section 4(4) Authorities will require political endorsement before it is submitted to EERA. In Bedfordshire this will mean that the Shadow Executives of the two new unitary authorities will need to consider the advice, prior to the County Council's Executive.