

# Luton and South Bedfordshire Urban Capacity Study

## Progress Update

- 1.1 Scott Wilson has been commissioned by English Partnerships in association with Luton Borough Council and South Bedfordshire District Council to undertake a review of the existing Housing Capacity Studies carried out individually for each of the authorities and to provide a report that considers the capacities of the two areas using the same criteria and methodology. This will also update the capacity estimate to reflect the current situation and to make use of best practice.
- 1.2 In parallel with the work to assess capacity, Scott Wilson has also undertaken a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment of both Local Authority areas. Whilst this topic will be reported upon separately, the impact of flood risk on the potential delivery of urban capacity is also considered by the report.
- 1.3 The aim is to provide a robust summary of urban capacity within Luton and South Bedfordshire that will contribute to the developing Local Development Frameworks for both authorities and in so doing establish the need for greenfield housing allocations. The report also represents one of the responses to the Milton Keynes South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy (2005) that has identified this area as a potential growth point. This is particularly relevant in the case of Luton, where the proposed M1/A1 link to the north of the town could provide indirect access to new housing areas.
- 1.4 The report considers the previous studies and establishes a methodology whereby some of the research and conclusions of these two earlier reports can be taken forward. It also provides detail of additional work that has been undertaken to ensure that the resulting study is robust.

## Methodology

- 1.5 The combination of the previous studies to form a holistic urban capacity study that would provide a robust base upon which to consider the likely contribution of urban capacity to the delivery of additional housing in the local authority areas is a complex task.
- 1.6 The starting point was to identify a study area that would be consistent between Luton and South Bedfordshire. For this, we took the Luton study as the starting point and adopted this approach within South Bedfordshire. This involved considering the main towns and key villages within the district and applying to them an approach based upon that adopted in Luton. This involved the definition of the main settlements and the establishment of character areas within them.
- 1.7 As a rule of thumb, each site considered by the study has been the subject of a site visit, whether by the local authorities or their representatives in the first instance or by the Scott Wilson team. In the case of town centres within South Bedfordshire, Scott Wilson undertook a 100% survey to complement the work previously undertaken within Luton. In terms of the 'character areas', a further

25% sample was taken of the Luton sites, with a 35% sample taken of the character areas established in South Bedfordshire. In the case of Luton, the site surveys also included the 'one-off' sites where they were located within the new sample character areas.

- 1.8 A new sample proforma was applied to all the sites considered by this study. The proforma identified the capacity source, the potential for development, any major constraints and site sustainability. The proformas provided a sustainability score for each of the sites that will be used to assess the potential delivery period for each site. The proforma was also supplemented by parallel work undertaken to assess flood risk and additional work undertaken by Knight Frank to inform the market potential of a sample of sites to underpin the actions of the market on site deliverability.
- 1.9 Where sites identified in previous studies have been included, they were considered using the site proforma applied to the survey sites. A 35% sample of previously identified sites was undertaken which considered sites that were both taken forward and discounted in the previous studies.
- 1.10 In addition to the site survey work, trend data was also obtained from the two authorities to update progress that had been made in the delivery of housing both from sources identified in the previous capacity studies and allocations provided by local plans.
- 1.11 When the capacity from all sources has been assessed, delivery will be considered both in terms of likely time frame and taking into account constraints such as flood plain issues, the effects of current planning policy and market viability.
- 1.12 The results of the study are currently being drawn together and will be presented at the Joint Committee Meeting.