

BEDFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL AND LUTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

21 SEPTEMBER 2004

3.00 PM

PRESENT:

Bedfordshire County Council

Councillor D G Barker
Councillor R M Goodwin
Councillor R Payne (in the Chair)
Councillor P G Roberts
Councillor R Stay

Luton Borough Council

Councillor R J Davis

Observers

Councillor B J Golby (Mid Bedfordshire District Council)
Councillor T Nicol (South Bedfordshire District Council)

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Franks, Hoyle and Ireland (Luton Borough Council).

12. MINUTES (REF: 2)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 January 2004 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

13. MATTERS ARISING (REF: 3)

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

14. MILTON KEYNES AND SOUTH MIDLANDS SUB-REGIONAL STRATEGY (REF: 4)

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Environment and Regeneration, Luton Borough Council and Strategic Director (Environment), Bedfordshire County Council which provided an update on the present position in relation to the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy.

Members were informed that the Public Examination into the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub Regional Strategy ended on 30 April 2004 and that the Panel report was published on 2nd August.

It was noted that the Secretary of State would consider the Panel's recommendations and publish changes to the strategy for consultation in the early autumn. The current expectation was that the consultation period would start from 18th October and end in mid January 2005. The Secretary of State would then consider the responses to the consultation before publishing the final Strategy in March 2005.

Reference was made to the Panel report making adverse comments on the timetable and consultation process, which was considered to be too quick and allowed limited engagement. The sub region-wide points included:-

- Support the need for a sub regional strategy, the overall level of housing growth proposed, the development strategy of urban concentration and the linkages between job growth and new households
- Addition of a new section on affordable housing to clarify role of growth area in meeting wider needs from outside of the area and extent to which strategy is dependant on additional funding;
- An additional emphasis on the protection and enhancement of the environment, including the provision of green infrastructure;
- Additional principles to better guide the implementation of development in accordance with sustainable principles;
- Confirmation that without significant infrastructure investment, the sub region will not be able to achieve the levels of housing and economic growth envisaged;
- Division of East/West rail into two sections; west of Bedford for implementation before 2011 and east of Bedford post 2021.

For Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis the main points were:-

- Leighton Linlade added to the growth area and housing provision in the whole growth area increased by 4,000, to 24,300 for the period 2001 to 2021; (of this 4,000 increase, some 2,500 are already committed at Leighton Linlade);
- For the period 2021 to 2031, development should be assumed to be at the same rate as in the period 2011 to 2021, but to be reviewed in the light of monitoring;
- Green Belt review in South Beds and North Herts Districts, to provide sufficient developable land up to 2031;
- An area of search for new urban extensions in an arc from the west of Dunstable, via the north and east of Luton, to the south of Luton;
- Sustainable urban extensions linked to the completion of necessary infrastructure such as M1 widening and Luton northern and eastern bypasses;
- Key transport objective for Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis must go well beyond the simple reconnection of Dunstable town with the Midland Mainline but extend to a step change in public transport accessibility and use throughout the conurbation.

Whilst there was much in the Panel Report which was consistent with the local authority views, the key concerns included :-

- Acceptance of HA and SRA timescales for infrastructure provision without challenge, rather than priorities related to delivery of growth;
- Split of East/West rail into 2 sections, which could sideline aspirations for the eastern section, Bedford to Cambridge;
- Joint Bedford Borough and Mid Beds Local Development Documents should be the means of determining future growth options; appears to devolve strategic planning to the local level;
- Lack of guidance for green belt reviews; needs to be a consistent approach, as in two Districts in different Counties;
- No clear statement about directions of growth around Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis; needs to be a consistent approach to appraisal of all options to provide a strategic planning framework;
- The net growth in jobs for Luton Borough and South Beds of 12,600, 2001 to 2021 looks to be too low.

In terms of the local delivery vehicle, there had been limited progress with the joint local authority proposal for an Urban Development Corporation for the Luton/Dunstable growth area. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had requested further work on what the UDC could do, especially to deliver regeneration within the urban areas. Discussions would continue between officers of the five local authorities involved and ODPM. The situation had become more complex as the Panel report had proposed the inclusion of Leighton Linlade in the growth area.

In relation to infrastructure investment, County, Luton, District and regional colleagues had identified transport and other infrastructure schemes which would be required in the region to deliver the housing and employment growth. These were submitted to the Government by the East of England Region as an input into the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). All the local MPs had been sent details of this submission and a briefing session had been held in the House of Commons.

The Chancellor's July announcement on the CSR included £200mn for a new Community Infrastructure Fund for the four growth areas. A further announcement on how this fund will be accessed was expected in the autumn.

The Health and Social care sub-groups statement to the MK and SM public examination stated that seven of eight Primary Care Trusts in the region confirmed that they were below their capitation level by about £40m in total. The Government had apparently agreed to make additional funding available over the next two years and to build in a Growth Areas adjustment into the funding formula when this was reviewed later in the year. The Health and Social Care sub-group had commissioned a firm of consultants to look at all the implications of the future growth for the health and social care sector and this study was at an early stage. A baseline study commissioned from Matrix consultancy estimated that by 2021 within the region as a whole there would be a need for over 700 additional area office/fieldwork staff, 350 more residential staff and almost 200 additional day care staff. That estimate would need to be reduced to apply to Bedfordshire and Luton alone and was simplistically based on population numbers. The more detailed study to clarify future needs was expected by May next year taking into

account changing models of care in the community and a clearer understanding of the type of planned development, where it would be and when it would be built.

The Committee noted that the South East Counties had commissioned work from consultants to cost the infrastructure needs of housing growth. In view of the close links between Bedfordshire and the South East region, the County Council was party to this work, which should report in early October.

RESOLVED:

That the report on the present position on the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy be noted.

15. REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY 14 – (REF: 5)

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Environment and Regeneration, Luton Borough Council and Strategic Director (Environment), Bedfordshire County Council in relation to advice from strategic planning authorities on Regional Spatial Strategy 14.

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires the Regional Planning Body to seek advice from strategic planning authorities on the review of the Regional Spatial Strategy (formerly Regional Planning Guidance) and requires the strategic planning authorities to give that advice.

The Regional Planning Panel of the East of England Regional Assembly on 16 July 2004 resolved to request advice from County and Unitary Councils to assist the completion of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RPG14). Advice was being sought on policy responses to the following studies: -

- London-Standed-Cambridge-Peterborough study
- Hertfordshire Housing capacity and spatial strategy audit
- Peterborough sub-region study
- RSS14 Employment Policy study
- Standed Second Runway study
- Norwich Sub Region study

Advice was also being sought on the expansion of London Luton Airport (LLA) on the regional housing and employment policies.

It was noted that the advice was required to be submitted by 24th September 2004.

Members were informed that the studies which had the most relevance were the Employment Policy and London Luton Airport. The report, now submitted, focused on these two reports.

In relation to RPG14 Employment Policy study, it was reported that it looked at the linkages between two Policies E1, job growth targets, and Policy H2, level and distribution of dwelling provision in the 'banked' RSS14. A key element of the study was to ascertain the degree of alignment between these two components of future

development. The study concluded that, whilst, at the regional level there was broad alignment there were problems in some cases at sub regional level.

In the case of Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis the Councils were reviewing whether the job growth figure was adequate to complement the proposed additional dwelling provision. EERA would need to be informed that the draft RSS14 would need to be revised to take account of the findings of the current alignment work.

It was noted that the study also confirmed two other concerns, namely, that RSS14 should indicate clearer policy guidance on monitoring the rate of job growth to ensure that it was not out of step with the rate of new housing. A particular concern was that, if dwelling growth outstripped job growth, the level of out commuting would increase further, thus undermining the achievement of sustainable communities.

In addition further text would need to be inserted in the draft RSS14 to explain the linkages between jobs and housing growth and how these had been derived.

In respect of the expansion of London-Luton, the main conclusions into the assessment of the employment and housing implications of the growth of London-Luton airport as proposed in the airports white paper were:-

- With or without a longer runway, the level of employment supported by LLA would grow significantly in the period to 2021.
- Direct employment at LLA had grown from 5,500 in 1991 to 7,800 in 2003. If LLA expanded to the maximum capacity of the existing 2,160m runway, direct employment would increase to around 12,400 and total employment supported in the region would be 21,800 jobs. If a longer 3,000m runway were to be developed, direct employment associated with LLA could increase to around 17,200 jobs and support a total of 30,200 jobs in the region.
- The conclusion was that the gross employment impact of a longer runway at Luton was approximately 8,300 jobs more than would be created anyway through the expansion of traffic with the existing runway. Given that direct employment associated with the airport was the greatest source of jobs, much of this was likely to be focused within the airport perimeter and the airport's core catchment area.
- Employment growth associated with a longer runway would not be smooth. In line with growth in air traffic forecasts, there would be significant growth in employment levels in the immediate period as LLA accommodates increasing levels of traffic in response to capacity constraints elsewhere in the South East. Total employment, for example, between 2001 and 2006 was predicted to increase by approximately 25%. The next step change in employment would be associated with the opening of the longer runway and the anticipation that capacity would be taken up very quickly. The period 2011 to 2016 could see gross employment increase by half from 16,400 jobs to 25,200 jobs – a large increase in a short period of time. Labour market adjustments would be needed to meet Luton's requirements at each of these times.

- The skills analysis identified that the growth in Luton employment would be across the broad spectrum of occupational classifications. The greatest skill requirement, however, would be in the operative and elementary occupations (low skilled) which account for around 30% of the LLA employment. Looking at the skills match between the resident population and forecast skill requirements in the catchment area indicates that an overall skills gap of between 4,000 and 6,000 jobs could be created and that the areas of skills deficit will be in the 'lowest' occupational categories.
- The implications of this were significant in that LLA would need to attract increasing numbers of lower skilled and lower paid workers, from a labour market that was already constrained in terms of capacity

It was noted that the local effect of airport growth was not considered so material as to merit specific provision being made for it outside of the general growth provisions of RPG14. However, it was felt that the employment effects may need careful management locally, especially as far as the provision of a suitable range of employment sites was concerned, a matter to be dealt with through preparation of Local Development Documents.

The overall conclusion with regards to the housing impact of extending LLA was that it represented only a marginal impact within the context of the wider growth of the sub-region. The LLA additional range of 3,000 to 6,000 dwellings represented only a small proportion of the overall growth of around 166,000 dwellings proposed for the catchment area, which included the Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis conurbation as a growth area within the Milton Keynes and South Midlands growth area.

Members recognised that the expansion of London Luton Airport could contribute to the regeneration of southern Bedfordshire and housing provision associated with the expansion could broadly be accommodated within housing growth proposals for the area. However, there should not be over reliance on this one sector to create the necessary jobs, which again highlighted the need for monitoring of job growth to check that it was not out of step with housing growth. RSS14 should also make explicit that the necessary transport infrastructure was provided in advance of airport growth.

Concerns were expressed that mechanisms were not established to ensure that housing growth matched employment growth.

A comment was made that security problems in the United Kingdom would continue to have an impact on planned airport growth. Members were informed that a study into the effect of the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 had shown that passenger numbers only reduced, significantly, for the first six weeks after the atrocities. It was further reported that security at the Airport had been and continued to be taken very seriously. Concerns, nevertheless, remained about security problems connected with flights into Luton from small airports.

A comment was made that the Airport was seen as a generator of employment and that the area needed a greater diversity of employment.

The Strategic Director (Environment) reported that the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) needed to take account of the need for diverse employment. He believed that it

was critical that suitable training should be readily available and reported that the Bedfordshire and Luton Learning and Skills Council was addressing the diverse training needs expected.

RESOLVED:

That the advice from Bedfordshire County Council and Luton Borough Council be based on the information set out above.

16. LUTON DUNSTABLE TRANSLINK (REF: 6)

The Committee received and noted a joint report of the Strategic Director (Environment), Bedfordshire County Council and Director of Environment and Regeneration, Luton Borough Council which updated Members on progress with the Luton Dunstable Translink Scheme.

Members were informed that the Public Inquiry would commence on 8 February 2005 at Luton Town Hall.

17. MAJOR HIGHWAYS SCHEMES (REF: 7)

The Committee received and noted a joint report of the Strategic Director (Environment), Bedfordshire County Council and the Director of Environment and Regeneration, Luton Borough Council which updated Members on the progress being made with the East Luton Corridor, Luton Northern Bypass and the M1 widening and Dunstable Northern Bypass.

18. LUTON DUNSTABLE LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN (REF: 8)

The Committee received and noted a joint report of the Strategic Director (Environment), Bedfordshire County Council and the Director of Environment and Regeneration, Luton Borough Council which gave details of the proposed approach to the production of the second Local Transport Plan for the Luton Dunstable area.

19. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS (REF: 9)

RESOLVED:

That meetings of the Committee be held as follows:-

Monday 6 December 2004 at 3.00 pm – Luton Town Hall

Wednesday 26 January 2005 at 3.00 pm – County Hall, Bedford