

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: New Communities Portfolio Holder

8 March 2011

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director (Operational Services) / Corporate Manager (Planning and New Communities)

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to agree the Local Development Scheme, which will set out the timetable for plan preparation for the 3 year period April 2011 – March 2014.
2. This is a key decision because:
 - it is likely to result in the Council incurring expenditure which is significant having regard to the Council's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates, which is included in the Council's budget.
 - it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working across the District.
 - it raises new issues of policy, or is made in the course of developing proposals to amend the policy framework.
 - it is of such significance to a locality, the Council or the services which it provides that the decision-taker is of the opinion that it should be treated as a key decision.

and it was first published in the May 2010 Forward Plan.

Recommendations

3. That the New Communities Portfolio Holder agrees that a single South Cambridgeshire Development Plan be prepared incorporating a review of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD), Site Specific Policies DPD and the Development Control Policies DPD to the timetable set out in Appendix 1, Tables 1 and 4. The Gypsies and Travellers DPD will continue to be prepared separately (Appendix 1, Table 3).
4. That authority be delegated to the Corporate Manager (Planning and New Communities) to complete a new Local Development Scheme on this basis.

Reasons for Recommendations

5. The recommended approach of combining DPDs has advantages in that it enables savings to be made on consultations and examinations, and the Policy Team would be better able to resource the key stages in the plan making process which will incorporate all key issues together, would speed up the overall timetable with adoption being slightly shorter than the typical time to prepare one individual DPD on its own. The timetable could be shorter by up to 2 years by incorporating the Gypsies and Travellers DPD but would delay the adoption of that particular DPD by 12 months.

Background

6. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires all local planning authorities to maintain a Local Development Scheme (LDS), which sets out its timetable for preparing Development Plan Documents (DPDs) over the forthcoming 3-year period. The Local Development Scheme must be submitted to and approved by the Secretary of State each year. The Localism Bill intends that a LDS will still be prepared and published on the Council's website, but that in future it will not need to be submitted to or agreed by the Secretary of State.

Considerations

7. The Council needs to carry out a review of its Core Strategy and Site Specific Policies DPDs in order to be able to demonstrate a 15-year supply of deliverable housing land and to provide a strategy more tailored to the period of recovery from the recent recession. The adopted Core Strategy currently provides for 5 years to March 2016, albeit that the adopted Area Action Plans for major new developments at Northstowe and on the edge of Cambridge do include provision beyond 2016, and was prepared in different economic circumstance than will be confronting South Cambridgeshire for the foreseeable future. The Development Control Policies DPD will also be reviewed to make any necessary changes that flow from the review of the Core Strategy as well as taking into account any other changes in circumstances. The adopted Area Action Plans address the whole of the development and there is no current intention to review these plans at this time, although this situation will be kept under review.
8. It is also necessary to complete work on the preparation of new planning policies for Gypsies and Travellers that has been started on the basis of preparing a separate Gypsies and Travellers DPD and has involved two rounds of public consultation on issues and options, with further actions agreed (see separate report to this meeting).
9. The Local Development Framework system was introduced with the intention of providing greater flexibility to Councils in preparing their plans and to speed up the plan making process by enabling Councils to focus on the areas of policy that needed review rather than requiring a district wide plan. Current Government guidance in PPS12: Local Spatial Planning is to prepare a separate Core Strategy that can include strategic allocations of land for housing, but that progress on the core strategy should not be held up by inclusion of non strategic sites. However, there is nothing in legislation or regulation that prohibits the Council taking a different approach and the Coalition Government's localism agenda points towards greater flexibility and local decision making on the most appropriate approach for a local area.
10. The Council has adopted a suite of separate DPDs which served the Councils purposes well in the strong economy at the time we started preparing those plans. However, the change in economic circumstances had significant implications for the later DPDs, including a change in land supply between the Core Strategy being adopted and the Site Specific Policies DPD being examined which led to a shortfall being identified by the Inspectors and a major additional stage for the Council in identifying new sites to meet that shortfall. Our experience of preparing several plans in parallel, even without the extra work required, was that the effects of examination of each DPD separately and in sequence resulted in a much extended plan making programme. There are also significant resource implications of preparing a number of separate plans both in terms of officer time to take each plan through the necessary statutory stages, including public consultation, and also particularly in terms of financial costs of consultation, examination and adoption.

11. The intention to date has been to prepare a separate Gypsies and Travellers DPD and considerable work has already been undertaken on issues and options for this plan. This approach was originally proposed because of government policy that was published after preparation of the original 6 DPDs had started and with a view to putting in place adopted policies for Gypsies and Travellers to address the target included in the East of England Plan single issue review as soon as possible. This is a priority for South Cambridgeshire in view of the level of identified need in the district and the number of temporary planning consents for sites that exists in the district pending completion of this process. It had been envisaged that the Gypsies and Travellers DPD would have been sufficiently advanced before work on the Core Strategy review started in earnest that it could be completed in parallel with that process. The level of interest in this process and uncertainties over changes in national policy since the Coalition Government was elected in May 2010 have resulted in delays.
12. The last Local Development Scheme envisaged that the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies DPD review would have started. This has not been possible in view of the Coalition Government's stated intention when it was elected in May 2010 to undertake a major review of the planning system with indications that a fundamentally new plan making system would be introduced. In the event, the Localism Bill does not propose changes to the LDF system and we can now progress, and the proposed abolition of regional plans make review of the Core Strategy a priority. The effects of the economic downturn have been significant on the house building industry and on the Council's 5-year housing land supply and other factors such as the dropping of the planned A14 improvements have also affected key strategic sites and potentially their contribution in the longer term, such that a review of the Site Specific Policies DPD is also now a priority. Delivery of housing is important in terms of meeting a high level of local housing need, supporting the local economy and is now also subject to the Government's New Homes Bonus which will bring financial resources to the Council at a time of constrained public sector funding. It is therefore appropriate to consider rolling the three plans together so that the site allocations needed will be in place in an adopted plan at the earliest opportunity.
13. The Council therefore has a number of important objectives for plan making at the present time which all need to be taken into account in determining the most appropriate approach for the next round of plan making:
 - To identify an appropriate housing target for South Cambridgeshire for the period to 2031 in the light of the proposed abolition of Regional Plans through the Localism Bill.
 - To determine the appropriate development strategy for the district to 2031
 - To identify an adequate supply of housing land, taking account of a shortfall in land supply identified in the Annual Monitoring Report both in the short term and longer term (having regard to the deliverability of key strategic sites)
 - To review the economic development policies for the district taking account of the effects of the economic downturn.
 - To identify an appropriate target for Gypsy and Traveller pitches for South Cambridgeshire to address local needs in the light of the proposed abolition of Regional Plans through the Localism Bill.
 - To prepare appropriate policies for the determination of planning applications for Gypsy and Traveller sites and allocate suitable sites.

Options

14. Under the Council's previous approach, four separate plans would be prepared: Core Strategy, Site Allocations, Development Management Policies and Gypsies & Travellers. Under this approach the three plans would not all be adopted until September 2016, without taking account of the implications of preparing a separate Gypsy and Traveller DPD (see Appendix 1, table 1). This has significant resource implications and would result in an unacceptable delay in securing adopted policies for housing allocations and is not recommended.
15. An alternative approach would be to progress the Core Strategy, Site Allocations and Development Management Policies as a single plan. This would reduce the overall timetable for completing the review of these three plans, again without taking account of the implications of preparing a separate Gypsy and Traveller DPD, to December 2014 (see Appendix 1, Table 2). This reflects the key corporate priority for the Council to deliver housing. This would mean continuing with the proposed separate Gypsy and Traveller DPD, also a corporate priority, means that key stages would need to run alongside each other.
16. Looking at the Gypsies and Travellers DPD separately, the earliest it is anticipated it could be completed, if the resources of the Policy Team were focused on that plan at the expense of progressing the Core Strategy and other DPD review, is December 2013 (see Appendix 1, Table 3). However, this could be later depending on other factors as identified in the separate Update Report on Gypsies and Travellers on this agenda which may indicate a longer timeframe.
17. Whilst the Policy Team is adequately resourced for one or other process, to run both together would mean that the overall timetable for each plan would take longer as the stages would need to run in sequence with only limited capacity for overlap. This has significant implications for the adoption of both plans or means that one plan would need to be given priority over the other with significant delays in adopting the other plan. It is difficult to predict the timetable for this approach which would also depend on which plan was given priority, but adoption of both plans is unlikely before end of 2017 (see Appendix 1, Table 4). Whilst costs would be reduced with two rather than four plans, the significant costs of two separate examinations would remain.
18. A further approach is to combine all plans needing to be reviewed into a single South Cambridgeshire Development Plan. This has advantages in that the Policy Team would be able to resource the key stages in the plan making process which will incorporate all key issues together, would speed up the overall timetable with adoption being slightly longer than for either plan individually, but significantly shorter than the overall timetable for two separate plans. A timetable for the preparation of the plan is included at Appendix 1.
19. Taking full account of the Council's objectives and the overall benefits and following consultations, it is recommended that the Gypsies and Travellers DPD continues to be prepared as a separate DPD and the Council accepts the delays that will inevitably result in the review of the Core Strategy, Site Specific Policies and Development Control Policies DPDs which will be progressed as a single DPD.

Implications

20. It is important to recognise that the recommended approach would mean that policies and proposals for housing and employment in particular would be adopted later than

by incorporating the Gypsies & Travellers DPD into the same plan. The delay could be as much as 2 years.

21. The Council still does not currently have a planning policy tailored to the consideration of planning applications for Gypsy and Traveller sites. General policies of the local development framework and national guidance have to currently be applied. Without Gypsy and Traveller sites being addressed in the Local Development Framework, the Council is unable to demonstrate that it can make provision for all sections of the local community or how the needs identified in the East of England Plan and current Needs Assessment will be met. Inspectors can take into account the level of need and the availability of alternative provision when determining planning appeals.
22. There are 74 existing Gypsy and Traveller pitches that have been granted a temporary planning permission. This reflects circular 01/2006, and is justified where there is currently an unmet need, but where it is expected that the planning circumstances will change in a particular way at the end of the period of the temporary permission. The preparation of the GTDPD has been considered such a circumstance. The permissions will now expire for a number of sites before the issue can be addressed through the development plan, although this would be the case for some sites even with a separate plan.
23. The Council needs to consider corporately how it addresses the needs of Gypsies and Travellers in both the short and longer term. This issue is considered in the separate report at this meeting.

24.	Financial	The single plan approach has considerable cost savings for the Council in future years.
	Legal	None
	Staffing	The recommended approach is within existing resources.
	Risk Management	The risks of major delay of either plan are addressed in the report with the recommended approach having the least overall risks.
	Equality and Diversity	The single plan approach will not include Gypsies and Travellers as a part of mainstream plan making and will continue to treat this ethnic group separately.
	Equality Impact Assessment completed	No The South Cambridgeshire Development Plan will be subject to Assessment.
	Climate Change	No direct implications for Climate Change but this will be a key consideration in plan making.

Consultations

25. Consultation with lead members and the Council's Executive on priorities.

Effect on Strategic Aims

26. **We are committed to being a listening Council, providing first class services accessible to all:** The plan making process includes a number of stages where the Council engages with a wide variety of stakeholder including the local community.

27. **We are committed to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for you and your family:** A key aim of the South Cambridgeshire Development Plan will be to meet this objective.
28. **We are committed to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live:** A key aim of the South Cambridgeshire Development Plan will be to meet this objective.
29. **We are committed to assisting provision of local jobs for you and your family:** The South Cambridgeshire Development Plan will include a review of employment policies to ensure that appropriate policies are included to meet the needs of the area in the current economic climate and moving forwards.
30. **We are committed to providing a voice for rural life:** The plan making process includes a number of stages where the Council engages with a wide variety of stakeholder including the local community.

Conclusions / Summary

31. It is a high priority for the Council to review the Core Strategy, Site Specific Policies DPD and Development Control DPD as soon as possible in view of the anticipated abolition of the East of England Plan, a shortfall in housing land supply and changes in the economic climate since the plans were adopted. It is also a high priority to put in place policies to deliver Gypsy and Traveller sites. These two priorities are in competition for the Council's plan-making resources and cannot appear to be reconciled without delaying the adoption of one or other plan. It is recommended that, taking account of these twin objectives and in the interests of efficiency and management of resources, that the Gypsies and Travellers DPD is prepared and adopted separately (Appendix 1, Table 3) and that the Council accepts the inevitable delays that will occur in the adoption of a combined Core Strategy, Site Specific Policies and Development Control DPD (Appendix 1, Tables 1 and 3).

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

PPS12: Local Spatial Planning
Localism Bill 2010

Contact Officer: Caroline Hunt – Local Development Framework Team Leader
Telephone: (01954) 713196