

# **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Workshops**

## **Briefing Paper**

### **Purpose of the Workshops**

A series of workshops are being held with District Councillors, Parish Councils, Stakeholders and Housebuilders/Agents. The workshops are intended as an early opportunity for key players with an interest in South Cambs to engage with officers of the Council as Issues and Options for the new Local Plan are being developed. The approach will be to explore at each workshop that group's Vision for South Cambs for 2031 and to then discuss how the Local Plan can help deliver that vision.

### **What is a Local Plan?**

A Local Plan is a statutory document that local planning authorities must prepare that sets out the Council's vision for its area and includes policies and proposals that set out a framework for new development, the use of land and conservation of key assets. It should look forward over a 15 year period from the date it is adopted.

Under the Government's new Localism approach that will see the abolition of regional plans, the District Council's plan making responsibilities have been enhanced and it is now, for the first time, for the Council to set the overall development strategy for its area, as well as sites for development, working with neighbouring authorities under the 'duty to cooperate'.

### **Why Prepare a New Local Plan Now?**

The Council has a good track record of preparing development plans, most recently with the adoption of 7 plans that together form the South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework (LDF) between 2007 and 2010. It was the first in the country to have a new-style Core Strategy found 'sound' under the LDF system. However, the LDF only plans to 2016, although several of the major developments allocated will continue to provide development for many years beyond, such as Northstowe and North West Cambridge.

The Government is also about to publish a final version of the new National Planning Policy Framework that changes the emphasis in a number of important areas of planning that the Council will need to respond to quickly.

The Council therefore needs a new plan that looks further ahead in order to provide certainty to the development industry, stakeholders and the local community about how the Council envisages the needs of the area being met into the future. The new Local Plan will plan to 2031.

## The Plan Making Process

The Local Plan goes through a rigorous process to ensure it is soundly based. This includes producing an evidence base to identify issues that need to be addressed in the Local Plan, as well as initial consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, developers and the local community on issues and options for the plan. Careful consideration and recording of all reasonable options is a key requirement in order to comply with a European Directive. From that process, including consideration of views received, the Council will then choose its preferred options and a draft plan will be prepared. There will then be another round of public consultation on the draft plan and the Council will have the opportunity to consider the need for any further changes before submitting the plan to the Secretary of State.

The plan will then undergo public examination by an independent Planning Inspector who will consider the objections to the plan and its overall soundness, and then send a report to the Council recommending whether the plan is 'sound' and capable of being adopted, possibly with a number of changes. It will be for the Council to decide whether to make the changes recommended to it, or to propose alternative ways of addressing the Inspector's concerns. The Council will not be able to adopt an 'unsound' plan. Once necessary changes have been made, the Council will be able to adopt the Local Plan.

## Timetable

The key stages in the plan making process, including Member meetings are:

<b>Stage in preparing the Local Plan</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
Special Council / Northstowe & New Communities Portfolio Holder meeting to agree Issues and Options consultation	June 2012
Local Plan Issues and Options public consultation	Mid July – End September 2012
Special Council / Northstowe & New Communities Portfolio Holder meeting to agree preferred options	February 2013
Special Council / Cabinet meeting to agree Draft Submission Local Plan	May 2013
Draft Submission consultation	Mid June – End July 2013
Special Council meeting to agree Submission Local Plan	December 2013
Submit Local Plan to Secretary of State	December 2013
Public Examination by independent Planning Inspector	June – October 2014
Receipt of Inspector's Report	May 2015
Special Council meeting to consider	October 2015

## Key Issues

- **Development strategy** – the current development strategy for the Cambridge area is to encourage the provision of new jobs to support the nationally successful local economy with its focus on the high tech and bio tech sectors. New jobs will need new employees and the aim has been to provide as many of those new homes as close to the jobs in and around Cambridge as possible, to minimise commuting and congestion. That has resulted in high levels of planned growth in both employment and housing, with significant in-migration to provide the new workers. An agreed development sequence has aimed to provide sustainable development, focused on Cambridge and Northstowe so that residents will be close to jobs, services and facilities and also have the opportunity to use sustainable methods of transport to access them. This resulted in a move away from the previous dispersed development strategy and relatively little growth is currently planned in villages. The village hierarchy categorises villages by their size, level of services and accessibility. A key issue for the new Local Plan will be whether this remains the most appropriate strategy for the district or whether any alternative strategies should be considered.
- **Latest forecasts** – new forecasts are being prepared to help understand the numbers of jobs and homes required to meet needs in the Cambridge area, including South Cambs over the plan period to 2031. The most recent forecasts currently available are from 2009 when the Cambridgeshire Councils commissioned and agreed the Cambridgeshire Development Study. That study concluded that taking account of the early part of the recession and the anticipated rate of recovery, the current development strategy (which looked to 2016) would actually meet the needs of the area for much longer, with only a limited additional amount of housing development needed over and above planned growth. The implications for South Cambs, also allowing for replacing the South Cambs part of Cambridge Airport now that Marshalls has indicated its intention not to relocate for the foreseeable future, are that we anticipate a need to allocate land for around another 10,000 dwellings on top of the current development strategy.
- **Sustainable development and climate change** – the current LDF takes a pro-active approach to achieving sustainable development and aimed to be pushing the sustainability agenda forward, particularly at the major developments where policies require that they be exemplars in sustainability. Time moves on and levels of sustainability and new technologies have moved on quickly too. The increasing awareness of the need for development to mitigate the impacts of climate change and adapt to take account of its effects will also need to be considered. Consideration will also need to be given to the approach to renewable

energy generation. We will need to review whether the current LDF approach remains the right one and whether it needs refining in the light of an increased emphasis on sustainable development in new national guidance and whether to set the bar potentially higher, for example, by including standards linked to the Code for Sustainable Homes.

- **Green Belt** – Cambridge is surrounded by a Green Belt to protect its special historic character and setting and coalescence with nearby villages. A review of the inner Green Belt boundary around Cambridge took place in the last Cambridgeshire Structure Plan 2003 (prepared by the County Council) and was given effect through the LDF and the Cambridge Local Plan. The new Local Plan will need to consider whether a wider review is justified having regard to the levels of development required and achieving sustainable development.
- **Economy** – Policies in the current LDF focus on supporting the Cambridge high tech and bio tech clusters that have been so successful, and include a number of major business parks in South Cambs, such as the Wellcome Trust at Hinxton, Granta Park and Babraham Hall as well as the Cambridge Science Park. This has not been to the exclusion of other forms of employment where small scale development has been encouraged. Policies also support the rural economy both in terms of retaining village employment and providing for rural diversification. An issue for the new Local Plan will be whether additional employment land needs to be identified. We will also need to consider whether keeping other forms of employment small scale, as in the LDF, remains the appropriate approach in the current economic conditions and given the Council’s support for business and what might be the effects of relaxing those limitations. The role of tourism in the district and the need for any further policies will also be explored.
- **Housing**
  - **Provision** – The housing allocations in our current plans, including the major developments on the Cambridge fringes and Northstowe will need to be reviewed through the new Local Plan to see if they remain appropriate for inclusion in the plan. It is not anticipated that there will be any major changes apart from reviewing Cambridge East now that Marshall’s is not relocating. A key issue for the Local Plan will be how much additional housing needs to be allocated having regard to the new forecasts and where those allocations should be. It is anticipated that a range of site options will be identified following the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA, almost 300 sites, enough for 100,000 houses, were put forward during the Call for Sites) and the Sustainability Appraisal, which may vary depending on the development strategies being considered.

- **Density** – The Government removed the minimum housing density of 30 dwellings per hectare from national planning guidance soon after coming into power. It will be for the Local Plan to consider the appropriate approach to housing densities in South Cambridgeshire.
- **Affordable housing** – There is a high level of housing need in South Cambs, reflecting the high level of house prices compared with local household incomes. There is currently a need for 837 new affordable homes every year, although when the current backlog of people in housing need that cannot be met is also taken into account, the total net need is for 1,372 affordable homes per year over the next 5 years. This compares with the annual housing requirement for all types of housing in the existing Core Strategy of 1,174 dwellings, a figure that the latest forecasts have broadly supported looking ahead to 2031. Affordable housing therefore remains a key Council priority. Nevertheless, we will still need to consider whether our current policy for 40% or more affordable housing remains the most appropriate, for example taking account of the effects of the recession on development viability. There are changes taking place in affordable housing funding and the range of affordable tenure options available that we will also need to consider. In addition, we will need to think about how we respond to the change in national planning policy on Exceptions Sites, which is introducing the potential to allow for a limited amount of market housing to be provided on exceptions sites to help cross fund the affordable housing, particularly given the changes in funding which mean there will not be grant funding available in future.
- **Travel** – Transport levels, congestion, air quality, public transport provision and cycling are all key issues that affect the daily lives of South Cambs residents and businesses. The Highways Agency is responsible for trunk roads (the M11, A14 and A428 in South Cambs) and the County Council is the highway authority for all other roads. The District Council's role is limited to working in partnership with the County Council and seeking to influence the transport planning of the area. The District Council is responsible for setting car parking and cycle parking standards in its development plans and we will be reviewing whether the current standards need to be reviewed given the change in national planning policy that will remove the maximum parking standards for housing developments.
- **Supporting infrastructure** – A key aspect of providing quality developments is ensuring that they have access to the necessary services and facilities to support day-to-day life, including things like doctors, schools, shops, community buildings and open space. The Council has recently prepared a Services and Facilities Study in consultation with Parish Councils and local Members that captures local community assets in the district. The current LDF requires: the provision of services and facilities with larger developments;

contributions towards enhancement of existing facilities in smaller developments; and protection of existing services and facilities unless strict conditions are met demonstrating that they are no longer viable. Studies for the Cambridge area have suggested a need for various major facilities, such as a community stadium, to serve the needs of the area and to support the increased local population. The study and its implications for South Cambridgeshire, will be considered in preparing the Local Plan. Experience of new developments is that the delivery of the supporting services and facilities in a timely way is not always straightforward. The new Local Plan will need to make sure any new developments also make appropriate provision. It may also be desirable to explore whether there is anything it can do to strengthen the delivery process.

- **Townscape, Heritage and Natural Environment** – South Cambs scores consistently well in surveys of the best places to live in the country. One aspect of its attraction to business is the quality of the local environment. This quality is also valued by local communities. An issue for the new Local Plan will be whether the existing policies for protecting and enhancing local character and quality need to be reviewed. This includes considering the balance between conservation of historic assets and support for the local economy. A further issue will be looking at Green Infrastructure and how improvements can be sought through development to support the growth agenda.
- **Gypsies and Travellers** – The new Local Plan will include policies and proposals to address the accommodation needs of these groups, which form the largest ethnic minority in the district. A considerable amount of work has already taken place through two Issues and Options consultations and this will feed into the new Local Plan. There will be additional issues to include in the forthcoming Local Plan Issues and Options consultation, in particular the need to consider options for a district target for new pitch provision now that this responsibility sits with the Council with the demise of regional plans. The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment that is nearing completion will be a key evidence base document for the new Local Plan.
- **Localism** – The new Localism Act creates new responsibilities and opportunities for local communities to be actively involved in planning. They will have the opportunity to prepare their own Neighbourhood Development Plans, where these are consistent with the strategic policies in the LDF and, when adopted, the new Local Plan. There is also an onus on the District Council to engage positively with local communities in the preparation of the Local Plan. A Parish Council Workshop is being held on 29 March to explore local aspirations for the future of the district. There is potential for the Council to explore ways of meeting local aspirations through the new Local Plan, which may save time and resources for both local communities and the District Council, rather than seek to support a potentially significant number of

local communities in preparing their own separate Neighbourhood Development Plans.