

**DRAFT PREFERRED OPTIONS FOR CORE POLICIES DPD
(Report by Head of Planning Services)**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report informs Cabinet of potential policy approaches for inclusion in a 'core policies' Development Plan Document, in advance of informal consultation with key stakeholders. It also explains the process for producing plans under the new planning system.

2 THE NEW PLANNING SYSTEM

- 2.1 Following a series of delays the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 has now come into force. The Act places a duty upon local planning authorities to prepare new types of 'Development Plan Document' (DPD), replacing the existing Local and Structure Plans. In the meantime existing adopted plans remain in force, being 'saved' automatically for a period of three years under the legislation. A brief guide to the elements of the new system is attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Work needs to proceed as quickly as possible on putting the new-style plans into place. The system no longer provides for a single 'Local Plan', but rather a number of plans serving particular purposes. The range of DPDs that this authority intends to produce will need to be set out formally in a 'Local Development Scheme', a draft of which will be available for Cabinet to consider in the New Year.
- 2.3 However, bearing in mind the legislative requirements, the issues facing Huntingdonshire and the need to avoid a confusing proliferation of plans, initial work suggests that the following DPDs will be appropriate:
- Core Strategy – setting out the spatial 'vision' for the area and criteria-based policies for guiding development
 - Development Proposals – containing allocations of land for housing and other uses
- 2.4 In addition, a separate DPD setting out proposals for gypsy and traveller sites may be appropriate, if a county-wide survey being conducted this winter identifies a need for accommodation in Huntingdonshire. Until very recently a DPD dealing with planning contributions (i.e. the matters that may need to be provided in association with new development, such as affordable housing and open space) had been envisaged as well, but a draft Circular now suggests that these requirements are most appropriately addressed through a Supplementary Planning Document.
- 2.5 Work on these different documents needs to be phased to allow for the availability of both staff time and information (for example, proposed allocations for housing will need to be informed by the outcome of the review of Regional Planning Guidance underway at

present). Priority is being given to the Core Strategy DPD, which will provide the spatial framework for all other documents.

3 PROCESS FOR PRODUCING THE CORE STRATEGY

- 3.1 Under the new system the first key stage is a 'Preferred Options Report' for each DPD. This will outline the general nature of the Council's intended policies and proposals, and be subject to full public consultation. Following that consultation the draft DPD itself can be prepared and submitted to the Secretary of State; further public consultation and a public inquiry will follow, leading to a binding Inspector's report.
- 3.2 However, before full public consultation on the Preferred Options can take place, the legislation requires some initial consultation with certain stakeholder groups on the matters relevant to them. This reflects a strong emphasis in the new system on early dialogue with key interests, to help shape policy approaches prior to the Council determining its formal proposals.
- 3.3 Hence Cabinet is not being asked to make any decisions about the policy approaches to be pursued at this stage; rather, the purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of potential approaches that will be discussed with key stakeholders in the New Year. Following those stakeholder discussions, Cabinet and Council will need to agree the proposals to be issued formally for public consultation. That decision will also need to be informed by a 'sustainability appraisal' of the potential policy approaches (see paragraph 4.7 below), which is also going to be undertaken in the New Year.
- 3.4 The interests to be consulted at this stage include town and parish councils, the County Council, EERA, EEDA, statutory bodies such as the Environment Agency, and groups representing particular interests locally such as the business community. The Local Strategic Partnership will be an important contributor to this process.
- 3.5 Due to the complexity of the new arrangements for plan production, and the differences with the old Local Plan system, a flow chart is attached at Appendix 2, indicating the key steps leading up to 'submission' and the intended timing of Member inputs in relation to the Core Strategy DPD.

4 THE POLICY SCOPING SHEETS

- 4.1 Officers have identified and drafted a suite of potential policy approaches that might be included in the Preferred Options Report. A list of these is attached as Appendix 3, and sheets outlining the suggested policy approaches themselves are at Appendix 4. It is these sheets that will form the basis of the discussions with key stakeholders. The potential policy approaches have been developed in consultation with the Development Plan Advisory Group, which met on three occasions during November.
- 4.2 The sheets in Appendix 4 are arranged by chapter. It should be noted that the text supporting each policy approach (i.e. the policy sources, reason for policy approach and alternative approaches) continues to

be refined, so some further editing will need to take place prior to these sheets being issued to key stakeholders in January. A number of other points should also be borne in mind when considering them:

- 4.3 First, the purpose of the 'key principles' chapter is to allow important considerations that are common to many different types of development to be addressed consistently and concisely at the outset. This reflects 'best practice' in policy drafting, and avoids the need for unnecessary repetition of particular points in subsequent chapters (the plan will make clear that all policies in the document need to be read together).
- 4.4 Second, policies in DPDs are not meant to repeat matters that are addressed adequately by national guidance or strategic policies (in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy). For instance, Planning Policy Guidance notes issued by the Government (which are being replaced progressively by 'Planning Policy Statements') contain much advice which applies universally, which carries considerable weight in planning decisions, and which does not need to be repeated in the plan. On the other hand, there are issues raised at the national / strategic levels that need to be interpreted or developed at the local level, and the sheets at Appendix 4 indicate the documents that have been drawn upon in this way.
- 4.5 Third, the policy scoping sheets also show how the suggested policy approaches link to objectives and actions contained in the Huntingdonshire Community Strategy. This is particularly important as DPDs are intended to be key vehicles for delivering those aspects of community strategies that have land-use implications. Other relevant strategies have also been taken into account (such as the Local Economy Strategy and Local Transport Plan).
- 4.6 Fourth – and a related point – policies in DPDs are intended to be 'spatial' in character. This means retaining the traditional land-use purpose of policies, but framing these so that they reflect the wide range of other strategies that may affect the way in which places develop (such as policies for future health care provision).
- 4.7 Finally, an important new requirement is the need to set out potential alternative approaches at the Preferred Options stage. This stems from the need for 'sustainability appraisal', which requires that the Council's preferred approaches are tested against other reasonable options to ensure that they are the most sustainable way forward. The policy scoping sheets indicate possible alternative approaches (where these exist), and the reasons why they are not being suggested as preferred options at this stage.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The policy scoping sheets appended to this report provide initial suggestions for policy approaches that might be pursued in the Council's Core Strategy DPD. They will be discussed with key stakeholders in the New Year, and be subjected to sustainability appraisal, before coming back to Cabinet for its consideration.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- a. Notes the intention to undertake informal consultation with key stakeholders on potential policy approaches for inclusion in a Core Strategy DPD, as required by the new planning legislation;
 - b. Notes that following this consultation and a sustainability appraisal, potential policy approaches will be presented to Cabinet and Full Council for decision, prior to formal public consultation in the summer of 2005;
 - c. Authorises the Head of Planning Services, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, to make limited changes to the policy scoping sheets attached to this report, as necessary during the process of final editing prior to the key stakeholder consultation.

Background Papers:

ODPM, 2004, *Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks*

Planning Officers' Society, 2004, *Policies for Spatial Plans: Consultation Draft*

CONTACT OFFICER - enquiries about this report to Dr Michael Bingham (Development Plans Manager), on 01480 388431.

Summary of components of new development plan system

- At present the development plan comprises the **Structure Plan** and **Local Plan**.
- Under the new system the development plan will instead comprise:
 - a) the **Regional Spatial Strategy** (RSS – a new form of regional planning guidance)
 - b) **Development Plan Documents** prepared by the local planning authority
- The Development Plan Documents will include as a minimum:
 - a) a 'core strategy' (setting out the spatial framework and key policies for the area)
 - b) a set of site-specific allocations
 - c) a proposals map
 - d) any 'action plans' which the authority chooses to produce, containing more detailed guidance for areas of particular change
- Taken together, these Development Plan Documents will in effect form the new 'local plan' for the area.
- It will still be possible to issue supplementary planning guidance, although this will be known as '**Supplementary Planning Documents**'.
- The Council will be required to produce a '**Statement of Community Involvement**' setting out how the public and other interests will be engaged in the process of preparing these various documents, and also in significant development control decisions.
- Development Plan Documents, Supplementary Planning Documents and the Statement of Community Involvement are given the generic name '**Local Development Documents**' in the new arrangements. Similarly, the particular set of these documents that apply to an area will be termed the '**Local Development Framework**'. It should be noted that these are both umbrella terms rather than adding anything to the particular collection of documents to be produced.
- The Council is also required to produce a '**Local Development Scheme**', listing the various documents that it intends to produce and the associated timetables.