

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

**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report informs Cabinet of the suggested preferred options for inclusion in the Council's Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD). Cabinet is invited to recommend to Council that the preferred options be approved as a basis for public consultation.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Core Strategy is the first policy document that the Council will produce as part of the new system of plan production. It will set out a spatial 'vision' for the area and criteria-based policies for guiding the development and use of land. It will also provide an over-arching framework for other documents, including a Planning Proposals DPD that will contain site-specific allocations.
- 2.2 The new system, and the range of documents to be produced, is explained in the Local Development Scheme that was considered by Cabinet on 17 March this year (and which has now been endorsed by the Government's regional office).
- 2.3 Potential policy approaches for inclusion in the Core Strategy were set out in a report to Cabinet on 16 December last year, in advance of consultation with key stakeholders on the options available. In the light of that consultation, together with the further technical work explained in section 4 of this report, officers have identified those policy approaches which are recommended for taking forward as the Council's 'preferred options'. They are set out in the report which has been circulated with this agenda item as Appendix 1.
- 2.4 The preferred options will be subject to full public consultation, following which a draft of the Core Strategy itself will need to be prepared, and then approved by the Council for submission to the Secretary of State. These steps are statutory requirements; in summary the overall process and expected timescale are as follows:
- Initial consultation with key stakeholders (January-February 2005)
  - **Public consultation on preferred options** (June-July 2005)
  - Draft Core Strategy submitted to the Secretary of State (expected April 2006), followed by further public consultation on its content
  - Independent examination into the proposals (October 2006)
  - Receipt of Inspector's report (binding upon the Council) and adoption (April 2007)

### **3 CONTENT OF THE PREFERRED OPTIONS REPORT**

- 3.1 The Preferred Options Report at Appendix 1 contains three key elements. The first is a 'spatial vision' for Huntingdonshire (section 6 of the report), which articulates the geographical implications of the plans and strategies of the Council and its partners to present an overall picture of how the shape of the area is expected to change over the next 15-20 years.
- 3.2 The Community Strategy has been an important influence upon this vision, along with other strategies that have significant spatial implications (such as the Local Transport Plan), strategic planning policies (such as those in the Structure Plan, although these will eventually be replaced by the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy) and the various regeneration and enhancement projects in which the Council is involved. A draft of the vision was presented to the Board of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership at its meeting on 20 April.
- 3.3 The second element is a series of 'spatial objectives' (section 7 of the report), which outline the main policy directions that need to be pursued in order to realise the vision. The objectives provide a bridge between the vision and the third element of the preferred options, which are the policy approaches contained in section 8.
- 3.4 The suggested policy approaches are arranged by subject area, with a set of over-arching 'key principles' forming the first group. These key principles enable important considerations that are common to many different types of development to be addressed consistently and concisely at the outset.
- 3.5 The boxes set out below each policy approach indicate the relationship with national and strategic planning policies (where relevant), the Huntingdonshire Community Strategy and sources of 'best practice' advice. Clear reasons for the policy approach are given, along with a resume of any reasonable alternative approaches that were considered but rejected.
- 3.6 The objectives and policy approaches are substantially the same as those presented to Cabinet for information on 16 December, although minor amendments have been made to reflect the outcome of the key stakeholder consultation and the initial sustainability appraisal (see below). The most significant changes are:
- Reference to Huntingdon and St Neots as being the Market Towns with the greatest potential for further development (reflecting the provisions of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan – see Policy Area P2)
  - A more comprehensive list of the infrastructure requirements that development proposals may need to contribute towards (P7)
  - Clarification of the proposed approach to the location of retirement housing (H9)
  - Expansion of the approach to the retention of key local facilities (E9), to cover urban neighbourhoods as well as villages, and help safeguard the vitality and viability of Key Centres

- Movement of the 'amenity' policy (previously P5) to the built environment section, which enables the 'key principles' policies to focus more clearly on strategic priorities (there has been some renumbering of policy approaches in these sections as a result)

3.7 Text which has been added or amended is highlighted in grey in the version of the Preferred Options Report contained in Appendix 1.

#### **4 BASIS FOR THE CORE STRATEGY PROPOSALS**

4.1 The preferred options are the product of considerable consultation and research, as well as reflecting the requirements and aspirations of other plans and strategies. The key influences are explained in sections 3 and 4 of the Preferred Options Report, but in summary they are:

- a) The requirements of national and strategic planning policies
- b) The spatial implications of other plans and strategies
- c) A number of research studies undertaken or commissioned by the Council (including work to support the proposed settlement hierarchy, which has fed into the background paper circulated as Appendix 2 to this agenda item; this is to be published alongside the Preferred Options Report)
- d) Consultation undertaken over an extended period during the introduction of the new system, including the 'twenty16' exercise carried out in 2003 and the recent 'Initial Consultation on Options' with key stakeholders (the results of which are summarised in Appendix 3 to this agenda item).
- e) The findings of the 'sustainability appraisal' of the proposals undertaken by consultants. An initial appraisal of the policy options that Cabinet considered on 16 December last year (prior to the key stakeholder consultation) concluded that the officers' suggested approaches would be more sustainable than the alternatives that had been identified. The Preferred Options Report presented here takes forward these suggested approaches, but the consultants are now preparing a draft Final Appraisal Report to accompany the preferred options consultation. Due to the very tight timescales involved a copy of their report was not available for circulation with the agenda, but their findings will be made available at the Cabinet meeting.

#### **5 NEXT STEPS**

5.1 The preferred options will represent the Council's proposals for the content of the Core Strategy DPD. They will be considered by a special meeting of Council on 25 May, and subject to its approval there will be a statutory six-week period for public consultation during June and July. Subsequently, the results of that consultation will need to be considered by the Council in finalising the Core Strategy that will be submitted to the Secretary of State.

5.2 The new system places considerable emphasis upon effective community involvement, and it is suggested that a special insert for the June issue of 'District Wide' be used to ensure widespread

circulation of a summary of the proposals. Whilst this will be the main means of communication a programme of other measures will be also be arranged to ensure the consultation is inclusive.

- 5.3 The availability of the Preferred Options Report itself, together with supporting material such as the sustainability appraisal, will be publicised widely – through the District Wide insert, newspaper advertisements and the Council's web site. The latter will also be used to host an 'interactive' version of the report which enables comments on individual policy approaches to be submitted electronically.

## **6 RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:  
Recommends to Council that the Preferred Options Report be approved as a basis for public consultation

### **Background Papers:**

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

Report to Cabinet, 16 December 2004, and Minutes, *Draft Preferred Options for Core Policies DPD*

HDC, 2005, *Sustainability Appraisal: Scoping Report*

Scott Wilson, 2005, *Sustainability Appraisal of the Initial Options for the Core Strategy Development Plan Document*

HDC, 2004, *Twenty16: Outcome of the Key Issues Exercise*

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