

**EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN – REPORT OF THE PANEL**

**(Report by Head of Planning Services )**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The independent Panel's report of the Public Examination of the Draft East of England Plan was published on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2006.
- 1.2 The Panel's report comments upon the basis and soundness of the Draft East of England Plan which outlines the proposed strategic planning approach for the East of England until 2021. As the East of England Plan (the RSS) will set out the strategic Planning Framework that will guide future development, and it's policies will have to be taken into account in all planning decisions (as a statutory part of the Development Plan), this is a fundamental planning issue for the future of Huntingdonshire.
- 1.3 At this stage it is for Cabinet to note the contents of this report and the informal responses that we have been asked to supply to EERA.

**2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 In brief summary the Panel concluded that in respect of the:-

**The Proposed Spatial Strategy**

- EERA's approach to basing future housing provision on urban concentration (in the main regional and sub regional cities and towns) is appropriate and can be supported.
- Cambridge and Peterborough are identified as key regional centres for development and change. None of Huntingdonshire's Market Towns are currently designated as such.

**The Peterborough Sub Region**

- There is broad consensus and agreement about the potential of Peterborough to accommodate additional economic and housing growth. Indeed additional regional growth at Peterborough (above these existing proposed levels) is an option to be considered as part of the first review of the RSS.
- Additional housing allocations proposed over and above the figures in the draft plan, amounts to 3,500 in Peterborough and 900 in Fenland. It is considered that effective delivery

arrangements will be needed in Peterborough to achieve this figure. Fenland must ensure that growth is matched by infrastructure and that it provides housing development that supports the local economy rather than extended commuting.

### **The Cambridge sub region**

- There is clear support for making the market towns more self sustaining in terms of employment, rather than extending their historic dormitory roles.
- Whilst some additional housing growth is proposed for Cambridge City (4,300) (and within a small additional amount (900) for Fenland), no figure of additional growth over and above the previously allocated 11,200 is proposed for Huntingdonshire
- In the review of this RSS (to potentially take place in 2010/11 Huntingdon is identified as a possible candidate for future major expansion (with any such expansion to possibly include use of brownfield land at Alconbury Airfield and/or Wyton Airfield)
- The Panel considered and dismissed the Developers current proposals for development (residential and warehousing) at Alconbury. Instead the Panel stated that any solution for Alconbury needs to emerge from the first review of the RSS. The Developers current aspirations would now run counter to this decision to rein back the previous aggressive dispersal policy.

### **Employment**

- Jobs growth to increase by 2100 in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
- Local development documents to identify readily serviceable regionally strategic employment sites in the Cambridge sub region in order to enable it to secure its full potential as a centre for world class research and development.

## **3. INITIAL RESPONSES TO THE PANEL REPORT**

3.1 EERA has asked the Council to provide them with an initial response to the draft Panel Report. Whilst there will be opportunities for formalised responses to be submitted, it is considered that the Council should initially respond on the basis of the following responses to the specific questions set by EERA:

Q1. Are the Panel recommendations on housing growth for your District/Borough/Unitary area likely to be accepted?

- It is anticipated that Huntingdonshire District Council would be likely to accept the Panel's recommendation regarding the scale of planned housing growth for the District. It is considered that the suggested growth figure (11,200) accords with the previously anticipated levels of projected housing growth and that, having

regard to existing commitments and the environmental capacity of Huntingdonshire, that level of growth could potentially be accommodated, in a sustainable manner provided that the necessary related jobs, and the required associated transport and community infrastructure, were also forthcoming. It is also considered that this suggested policy approach appropriately accords with the defined strategy for managing future housing growth within the Cambridge Sub-Region. i.e. that is seeking to focus the majority of future housing growth within Cambridge itself or on appropriate sites close to Cambridge.

Q2. If not, could you indicate the main reasons why your authority is unlikely to support the recommendation?

- N/A.

Q3. Do the Panel's recommendations on housing in relation to adjoining Districts raise any cross-boundary issues?

- The Council could only support the proposed additional housing in Peterborough if that housing growth;

A) Could be appropriately accommodated within the established boundaries of PCC. The Council would be particularly concerned to ensure that any such development was planned so as to ensure/maintain an appropriate degree of buffering and greenspace separation between any proposed outward expansion areas and the adjacent villages within Huntingdonshire. This separation would be essential in order to safeguard the setting, to maintain the distinct characteristics, to manage traffic movements and to ensure the environmental wellbeing of those Huntingdonshire villages which are located in close/direct proximity to the boundaries with PCC.

B) The delivery of that housing growth was carefully managed to ensure that the essential required balance between the delivery of new homes and jobs could be established/maintained. It is considered that it would be inappropriate to promote further housing growth in Peterborough which resulted in unacceptable increases in unsustainable 'out-commuting'.

- The Council could only support the proposed additional housing growth in Fenland if the delivery of that housing growth was carefully managed in order to establish a balance between homes and jobs within that district. Historically Fenland has acted as a 'dormitory' for other parts of Cambridgeshire, with considerable amounts of out-commuting being a feature of daily life, and it is considered that it would be inappropriate to perpetuate such an unsustainable approach. It is considered that poorly managed growth, without the delivery of local jobs, would potentially result in unacceptable impacts caused by additional traffic upon the local road networks and the environment of adjacent villages in Huntingdonshire.

Q4. Do you have any other immediate comments/anxieties about the Panel's report which you wish to bring to EERA's attention?

- The Council notes the comment in Paragraph 5.69 regarding the potential for Huntingdon to be considered as a possible candidate future “key centre for growth” (within the CSR). The Council would want to be assured that this process would have regard to the environmental capacity of Huntingdon i.e. that is the ability of the town to accommodate any additional future growth in a sustainable manner. The Council would obviously wish to take part in the on-going debate regarding any such future designations in order that it could develop a clearer understanding of the potential implications of any such designation. Notwithstanding such a process the Council would want to be re-assured that the early, planned, provision of the necessary related infrastructure (for example the delivery of the new A14) would be an essential component underpinning any such designation.
- The Council also notes the Panel's comments regarding the future of the former RAF Alconbury as set out in Paragraph's 5.72 – 5.75. The Council welcomes the Panel's conclusions in this matter and strongly supports the view that any potential solution for Alconbury needs to emerge from a thorough examination of all of the relevant issues which can appropriately be reflected in the first review of the RSS.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 It is anticipated that proposed changes to the East of England Plan (brought about by EERA formally considering their response to the Panel Report) will be published in November, after that there will be further consultations regarding any proposed changes and the final Regional Planning Strategy will be published in early 2007. Thereafter the relevant local Planning Authorities would have 3 years in which to ensure that their local Development Documents would in conformity with the RSS.



#### **5. RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 5.1 That the Cabinet notes the report and the initial responses to EERAs set questions as set out in section 3 of this report.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

East of England Plan 2004  
Report of the Panel – June 2006

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