

CABINET

22ND FEBRUARY 2007

**EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN – THE SECRETARY OF STATE’S PROPOSED
CHANGES TO THE DRAFT REVISION OF THE REGIONAL SPATIAL
STRATEGY AND STATEMENT OF REASONS**

(Report by Head of Planning Services)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes to the Draft Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England and Statement of Reasons were published in December 2006.
- 1.2 Comments are now invited in respect of the Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes with the formal consultation period ending on 9th March 2007. Following consideration of the responses received in respect of this consultation the Secretary of State is then expected to publish the finalised East of England Plan later in 2007.
- 1.3 The Cabinet is requested to note the conclusions emerging from the Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes and to endorse the proposed responses to this consultation as set out in Section 3 of this report.

2. THE SECRETARY OF STATE’S PROPOSED CHANGES

THE REGIONAL CORE STRATEGY

- 2.1 The proposed regional spatial strategy strongly reflects the Government’s aspirations for further significant growth throughout the region. The plan continues to direct strategically significant growth to the region’s major urban areas, applying the key principle of urban concentration, with Policy SS3 accordingly defining 21 Keys Centres for Development and Change (including both Cambridge and Peterborough). The Core Strategy goes on to advocate, in Policy SS4, that development within market and other towns will be supported where it would promote urban and rural renaissance, secure appropriate amounts of new housing, local employment and other facilities and improve the town’s accessibility (especially by public transport).
- 2.2 Previously the draft Plan stressed the need for a strong policy linkage between the planned locations for new growth and the need to deliver associated improvements in related infrastructure provision. The revised strategy does not sustain this requirement and the emphasis on this necessary requirement is therefore diluted via its replacement by a reference in Policy IMP1 to the need for high-level regional co-ordinating arrangements and an associated regional implementation plan.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- 2.3 The Secretary of State in Policy SS1 is seeking to deliver 'sustainable developments' by maximising the potential for people to form more sustainable relationships between their homes, their workplaces, the services they use and their means of travel between them (and thereby by respecting environmental limits upon development). The proposed changes also reflect recent guidance on climate change in that Policy ENG1 advocates reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, Policy WAT1 seeks reductions in water usage and the Plan proposes the general application of the precautionary principle to reduce, avoid or mitigate against adverse environmental changes. As per PPS3 a regional target for the re-use of previously developed land has been set at 60%. Policy ENV1 recognises the importance of The Great Fen Project (as a strategically significant green infrastructure project).

HOUSING

- 2.4 The proposed housing strategy, in Policy H1, proposes a further increase in the planned overall housing numbers for the region (from the draft Plan's 478,000 and the Panel's recommendation of 505,500) to at least 508,000. This is a modest increase (above the proposed scale of development previously supported by the Panel) with the stated intention being that this increase would be delivered via further planned expansion at Harlow.
- 2.5 With regard to Cambridgeshire the proposed overall housing target of 98,300 new dwellings, to be provided between 2001 to 2021, remains the same with all of the district totals therefore also remaining as advocated by the Panel; that is 11,200 for Huntingdonshire, 19,000 for Cambridge City, 8,600 for East Cambs, 11,000 for Fenland, 23,500 for South Cambs, 25,000 for Peterborough. These figures include increases (over the draft targets) for Cambridge City (+4,300), Peterborough (+3,500) and Fenland (+900) and there are some obvious concerns regarding the capacity of Cambridge to actually accommodate that number and the potential impacts upon Huntingdonshire of that extra housing in Fenland (at Chatteris).
- 2.6 However, and of particular concern because of the potential for Huntingdonshire to accommodate additional housing growth, the Secretary of State has stated in Policy H1 that the district allocations should be regarded as minimum targets to be achieved rather than ceilings which should not be exceeded. Planning authorities are advised that they should aim to deliver more housing, without breaching environmental limits or infrastructure constraints, by increasing density on appropriate sites in accordance with the advice in PPS3; by positively encouraging opportunities on suitable previously developed sites; and by making best use of rural exception policies.
- 2.7 The various proposals for further new settlements have been rejected at this stage but the Secretary of State has indicated that all growth options, including the potential for major new settlements, will need to be considered during the planned early review of the RSS (which would extend the plan period up to 2031). Local Development Documents are however required to consider making provision for post 2021 based on this Plan's extrapolated rates of growth.

- 2.8 With regard to affordable housing provision, and again this is an issue of some concern, the Secretary of State has advocated a regional aspiration for 35% affordable housing provision (in Policy H3). Obviously this revised aspiration is already in conflict with our current planning policies which already seek 40% affordable housing provision to meet the needs of the Cambridge Sub-Region.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- 2.9 The Plan's economic development strategy advocates the continued growth of the regions already 'relatively strong economy' although this aim is also tempered by recognition of the need to better align the location of homes and jobs. Therefore, alongside the planned growth in homes, large amounts of new jobs are also proposed in Policy E1 (an indicative 452,000 for the whole region up to 2021 which is an increase from the Panel's recommended 440,000) with 95,000 of those being proposed within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (with that total being made up of 75,000 new jobs within the districts and 20,000 in Peterborough).
- 2.10 Regional strategic employment locations are defined by Policy E3 with the Cambridge Sub-Region being designated as a centre for world-class research and development whilst Peterborough, to achieve regeneration, is advocated as a centre for the growth of environmental services. Policy E4 on cluster development goes on to outline support for a life-science regional super-cluster with concentrations at locations including the Cambridge Sub-Region, an environmental technologies cluster stretching from Essex to Cambridgeshire with a particular focus on Peterborough and a strong ICT cluster in the Cambridge area.

THE REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY

- 2.11 The proposed regional transport strategy generally endorses the principle of reducing the need to travel in Policy T2 (although the previously announced aim of producing an absolute reduction in traffic levels within the plan period has been deleted). In terms of traffic management Cambridge is highlighted, in Policy T5, as a location where further study is required in order to identify the nature of the required interventions. Identified transport priority areas include the London, Stevenage, Peterborough corridor. The efficient movement of strategic freight is also identified as a priority by Policy T10.
- 2.12 There is also now a lack of reference to the planned delivery of the required improvements in transport infrastructure (with all previous references to specific transport schemes now being deleted). In terms of transport policy proposals there appears to be a strong emphasis upon the radial routes into London but little reference to the need for effective improvements to the east-west corridors (including the need for Felixstowe to Nuneaton east-west rail route or the A428 Trunk Road).

WASTE

- 2.13 The waste management strategy proposes that there would be a progressive reduction in waste imported into the region (from London) up to 2015 and then amounts would remain stable up to the end of the plan period. Planned importation into Cambridgeshire and Peterborough would rise to 410,000 tonnes per annum by 2010/11 before falling back to 200,000 tonnes per annum thereafter. It is proposed in Policy WM4 that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough would continue to accommodate some 21% of all of the imported waste (and this issue will of course be a major material consideration in respect of the emerging Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Plan).

SUB-AREAS AND KEY CENTRES FOR DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

The Cambridge Sub-Region

- 2.14 The definition of the Cambridge Sub-Region has been clarified in effect to reinstate its wider hinterland including the four towns (Newmarket, Haverhill, Saffron Walden and Royston) located outside of Cambridgeshire. The strategy for the sub-region, as set out in Policies CSR1 to CSR4, emphasises the sequential approach to accommodating growth (within Cambridge, on the periphery of Cambridge, at Northstowe and then within, or on the peripheries of, the sub-region's market towns. The plan also stresses that the focus in the early years from 2007 will be on the delivery of the sub-regional growth strategy. Although references to Cambridge as 'a compact city' have been deleted other policies still emphasise the need to maintain the Green Belt around the city and to demand manage further transportation growth.

Peterborough

- 2.15 Peterborough is defined in Policy PB1 as a Key Centre for Development and Change (but not as a defined sub-region) with the aim being to strengthen Peterborough's role as a major regional centre and focus for the northern part of the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough Growth Area. Peterborough is also identified as being a priority area for regeneration.

3. PROPOSED RESPONSES TO THE PROPOSED CHANGES

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Council responds to this consultation on the basis that it can positively support;
- The Plan's commitment to the application of positive locational planning policies in order to deliver sustainable developments (in Policies SS3 and SS4),
 - The Plan's commitment to reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, water usage and the effective usage of brownfield land (in Policies SS1, ENG1, WAT1 and as per PPS3),
 - The Plan's retention in Policy H1 of the previously outlined housing targets for Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire

(although there are some concerns regarding the scale of proposed development in Cambridge and Fenland and the impacts of both potential non-delivery or unsustainable delivery of that housing upon Huntingdonshire).

- The clarification of policy regarding the approach to development within the Cambridge Sub-Region and particularly the sequential approach to locating development therein, as set in Policies CSR1 to CSR4.

3.2 But it is concerned that;

- Policy IMP 1 effectively deletes the previously defined policy linkage between the planned locations for new growth and the need to deliver associated improvements in infrastructure provision.
- Policy H1, which states that the district allocations should be regarded as minimum targets to be achieved rather than ceilings not to be exceeded, will put undue pressure on Districts, such as Huntingdonshire, which have previously delivered large amounts of housing growth, and where there are now serious questions arising about whether there is sufficient environmental capacity to accommodate further large scale growth, and whether the discernable mounting pressures on local infrastructure provision can actually be rectified.
- The Plan's stated commitment to a regional 35% affordable housing aspiration (in Policy H3) will be in conflict with existing planning policies for the delivery of affordable housing within the Cambridge Sub-Region, where there is already an identified need for 40% provision on qualifying sites.
- The lack of reference in the applicable Transport policies to the planned delivery of the required improvements in transport infrastructure (with all reference to specific transport schemes now being deleted) and no real recognition of the need for improved east-west linkages.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 It is important to acknowledge that the East of England Plan will set the strategic planning framework for this region for the period up to 2021. Therefore it will be a fundamental aspect of policy, which will guide all strategic development and planning decisions, and the application of its policies will have a pronounced impact on the future form, nature and character of Huntingdonshire. Accordingly it is considered that the Council responds to this consultation as set out in Section 3 of this report and that we also commit ourselves to continuing to work closely with our partners within Cambridgeshire, and elsewhere across the region, in order to present appropriate co-ordinated strategic responses to these overarching planning policy issues.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 That the Cabinet notes the basis of this report and endorses the proposed responses to the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the East of England Plan as set out in section 3 of this report.
- 5.2 That the Cabinet also endorses the Council's commitment to working with the other Cambridgeshire Planning Authorities, and our other regional and sub-regional partners, in order to submit appropriately co-ordinated responses to these strategic planning issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

East of England Plan - 2004
Report of the Panel – June 2006
The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes – December 2006

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