

**LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
THE CORE STRATEGY -
PREFERRED OPTIONS
(Report by Head of Planning Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is for the Cabinet to agree the Preferred Options for the Core Strategy so that they can be then subject to pre-submission public participation under Regulation 26.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Core Strategy is the primary document of the Local Development Framework (LDF). As a Development Plan Document, it will need to be submitted to the Secretary of State and then be subject to examination by an independent Inspector to assess whether it meets the tests of soundness. It will be supported by the related Development Control Policies Development Plan Document that will also be coming forward to Cabinet shortly.
- 2.2 The Council consulted on Issues and Options (the Regulation 25 stage) for the Core Strategy during May, June and July 2007. In addition to engaging with stakeholders (such as Parish Councils, the County Council, Primary Care Trust, Highways Agency, Environment Agency etc), the general public were also invited to comment. The Document was made available at Pathfinder House and in libraries and local access points across the District and through an interactive on-line version on the Council's website. The representations made on the Issues and Options Document have been taken into account in coming to the Preferred Options.
- 2.3 In respect of the Core Strategy, a major issue has been the development of a Spatial Strategy for Huntingdonshire and this led to the production of an additional document 'Towards a Spatial Strategy'. This was the subject of further engagement with key stakeholders. Again, the comments made on this document have assisted in the production of the Preferred Options for the Core Strategy.
- 2.4 The Core Strategy specifically takes account of the existing Community Strategy and its emerging replacement, the Sustainable Community Strategy. The Core Strategy also has been prepared taking into account the emerging policies in the East of England Plan which is close to adoption and current Government Guidance.

- 2.5 The Preferred Options have been set out in two volumes. **Volume 1** takes the form of a draft strategy outlining the key policies and their reasoned justification. **Volume 2**, the development of Preferred Options, records how each Preferred Option was assessed and evaluated and thus forms the necessary audit trail for the development of the policies. This includes the Options which have been the subject of consultation, any further Options arising (this is only in respect of the Spatial Strategy), a summary of the results of Community Involvement, a summary of the Initial Sustainability Appraisal of the Options, the Council's response and how it performs against the Tests of Soundness as set out by Regulations. Appropriate Assessment as required by the European Directive on Habitats will be undertaken to test the Document when it is submitted to the Secretary of State.
- 2.6 The Preferred Options are to be the subject of Pre-Submission public participation from December to mid January. Representations will be invited, either in support or objection to the draft policies set out in Volume 1. Volume 2 assists consultees by providing details of the process by which the Council has developed the preferred options. These documents are set out as an Appendix to this report.

3. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- 3.1 The Core Strategy has been informed by various supporting technical documents including the Housing Land Availability Study and an Employment Land Review, both of which have been the subject of consultation, an Update to the Retail Study and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.

4. THE CORE STRATEGY

- 4.1 The Preferred Option is in essence a combination of two of the draft options as set out in 'Towards a Spatial Strategy' – Option C (St Neots area growth focus) with additional growth in the Huntingdon area (but not up to the same level as Option B, Huntingdon area growth focus) which will deliver at least 5500 new dwellings, 82 ha of employment land and up to 2200sq m of retail development during the period 2006 - 2021.
- 4.2 The Preferred Option has been formulated taking into account the following:
- Both the St Neots and Huntingdon Spatial Planning Areas score highly on sustainability grounds in view of their good access to employment and major services and facilities.
 - Large sites are available in these locations that can provide essential new infrastructure through planning obligations. In the case of St Neots a large scale urban extension east of the railway offers a unique opportunity to create a truly sustainable community with the building of a secondary school, a higher level of related employment than was envisaged in the Employment Land Review and the construction of a viable district centre which will complement the town centre.
 - The large sites in these locations will be able to integrate more easily with the existing urban communities.

- The Huntingdon area can provide a variety of sites on brownfield land and maintain a good proportion of total sites being brought forward on previously developed land in accordance with key Government guidance.
- A major constraint to development of sites in St Ives is the presence of the flood plain which affects potential sites closer to the town centre where retail and other services are on offer. The other option in St Ives is to consider further growth to the west of the town where the issue of maintaining green-space separation between St Ives and Houghton is a significant issue.
- In the Huntingdon area another significant spatial issue is the considerable distance from the town centre of potential sites to the north of the town.
- The need to now make provision for a 15 year supply of available land will require land to be provided in a variety of different locations.
- The provision and the timing of major infrastructure (e.g. the A14 and improvements to the A428) will potentially dictate the application of a phasing policy to be applied to land in the Huntingdon area and therefore delaying its release until after potentially earlier available land in St Neots.

5. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 5.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve the Preferred Options for the Core Strategy as set out in the Appendix (as Volume 1 and Volume 2) for public participation under Regulation 26 and to agree that any minor additional editing and updating which may be needed prior to publication be delegated to Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Core Strategy Issues & Options Report HDC
 Towards a Spatial Strategy HDC
 Housing Land Availability Study
 Employment Land Review
 Huntingdonshire Retail Study Up-date 2007
 Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
 Green Infrastructure Strategy – Cambridgeshire Horizons

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