

**THE REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY REVIEW – THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE
DEVELOPMENT STUDY
(Report by Head of Planning Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet that effective joint-working, between all of the Cambridgeshire authorities, has now resulted in a situation whereby the County Council will in the near future be in a position to submit its advice to EERA (as the initial county-wide response to their request for appropriate information to inform the RSS Review).

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The current strategic planning policy position is that the approved Regional Spatial Strategy, the East of England Plan, which was issued in May 2008, sets out growth requirements for the period up to 2021. The current Plan envisages that Huntingdonshire will deliver a minimum of 11,200 new dwellings, associated employment and other development during that time period.

2.2 Because of the need for the Council to effectively plan for the delivery of a 15 year housing land supply HDC's Submitted Core Strategy extends that plan period up to 2026. Our Core Strategy proposes that Huntingdonshire will deliver a minimum of 14,000 new dwellings (a figure which is made up of the committed 11,200 homes + an applied annual growth rate) and associated employment and other related development during that period.

2.3 The Government now requires EERA to review the East of England Plan in order to extend its life up till 2031 and to potentially plan to accommodate further substantial amounts of residential and employment growth within the region. In accordance with the Governments requirements EERA have now commenced upon that 'early review' with the whole process being proposed to be completed, in what is acknowledged to be a very short and challenging timescale, by 2011.

3. THE REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY

3.1 EERA requires its constituent 4/4 authorities – that is the applicable County Council's and Unitary Authorities – to provide strategic planning 'advice' to them specifically commenting upon ;

- How they consider that the various potential levels of future growth (as suggested by the NHPAU – the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit) could be accommodated within their areas. These suggested NHPAU scenario's for future growth indicate that Huntingdonshire may need to plan to accommodate somewhere between 3,000 and 17,000 additional new homes in the period to 2021 to 2031.

- The potential appropriateness of 'Development Proposals' submitted by various private sector landowner and developer interests in response to EERA's request for such submissions. 'Developer' proposals have been submitted in respect of several potential development sites all across Cambridgeshire and two such proposals were submitted in respect of proposals in Huntingdonshire – in respect of Alconbury Airfield and St Neots East.
- To support the review process EERA has also commissioned consultants (Arups) to prepare a Regional Scale Settlement Study in order to inform the possible growth strategy. That study proposes that various existing larger settlements, including Cambridge, may well be subject to further 'regional scale growth' and that 'new regional scale growth locations' (Regional Scale Settlements) may also be an appropriate policy option. It is proposed that new Regional Scale Settlements could deliver a minimum of 20,000 homes and have the 'potential' to accommodate far more up to an eventual long-term capacity of 250,000 people. Members will be aware that 'North Huntingdon/Alconbury' has been identified as a potential strong option for such a development by that study. HDC is in the process of commissioning additional targeted studies to help us evaluate the potential environmental capacity and implications of further growth for Huntingdonshire. It is considered that these studies will be fundamental in respect of refining HDC's views in order to inform the next stages of this work and to put us in a position whereby we can more readily respond to EERA's future options consultation.

3.2 In response to this request to provide advice to EERA with regard to these three issues Cambridgeshire County Council, working in partnership with all of the district authorities, commissioned their own consultancy team (made up of WSP and SQW et al) to prepare the 'Cambridgeshire Development Study' in order to establish how sustainable different levels of further growth could potentially be accommodated within Cambridgeshire. That Cambridgeshire wide process is being directed by the Joint Cambridgeshire Regional Spatial Strategy Review Panel (CReSSP).

4. THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE DEVELOPMENT STUDY- DRAFT ADVICE TO EERA FROM THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE AUTHORITIES

4.1 It is intended that CReSSP will consider and endorse the suggested 'draft advice' to EERA at its next meeting on the 7th April 2009 (and a copy of the applicable report is attached for Members information). Due to the respective deadlines this report obviously had to be prepared in advance of that meeting and the finalisation of the study. Therefore it is my intention that appropriate verbal updates will supplement this report as applicable.

4.2 The suggested Draft Advice to EERA considers and comments upon the applicable processes that have been undertaken and the options considered in its various sections;

- Section 2 outlines the Consultation Process that has been undertaken to date.
- Section 3 outlines the suggested responses to EERA's Call for Development Proposals. Paragraph's 3.3 to 3.8 of the

CReSSP report comments upon the basis of the submitted developer proposals and it is considered that the suggested responses, to the two proposals in Huntingdonshire, are appropriate at this point in time. Further work needs to be done with regard to the perceived acceptability of some of the other options.

- ❖ An option of further highly sustainable growth to the East of St Neots accords with the suggested directions of strategic growth as set out in our Submitted Core Strategy. Therefore it is considered that the suggested response, that the proposal may have some potential, can be supported.
 - ❖ It is widely acknowledged that Alconbury Airfield is a resource, and a potential development option, that may need to be appropriately considered in respect of any future growth strategy for the district. Accordingly it is appropriate that it is considered to be worthy of further consideration at this early stage of the review process.
 - ❖ Whilst many of the options outlined in Paragraphs 3.3 to 3.7 are logical initial responses to the potential appropriateness of the submitted proposals I think it should be questioned as to why previously 'highly' regarded and supposedly sustainable locations, such as Northstowe and Camborne, are now considered to be less acceptable alternatives.
- Section 4 comments upon the Regional Scale Settlement Study both in general and with particular regard to the identified 'North Huntingdon/Alconbury' large scale new settlement option. Whilst many of the comments can be supported, certainly in terms of the very limited overall robustness of the report and the clear concerns as to whether Cambridge City could actually deliver additional sustainable growth, it is considered that some of the suggested wording needs to be deleted. Whilst it is considered that the content of sub-paragraph's 4.2 h), j) and k) can be endorsed it is suggested that the comments in sub-paragraph i) are far too positive in their tone and therefore should be deleted.
 - Section 5 comments upon the testing to be applied to the housing and job scenarios. It is considered that positive support should be given to the view, as set out in Paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8, that the 'higher' level scenarios are totally unrealistic and that testing should therefore be limited to the more appropriate lower level growth scenarios.
 - Section 6 comments upon the suggested District distribution of houses and jobs and the related Sub-Regional policy. It is considered that the comments set out in Paragraphs 6.3 to 6.6 should be endorsed with particular emphasis being given to the statements as set out in Paragraph 6.6. It is clear that the existing, and committed, sub-regional strategy needs to be successfully delivered prior to any consideration of potential alternative approaches.

- Section 7 comments upon the proposed rolling forward of existing RSS and extended Structure Plan policies. It is considered that the suggested approach can be supported.
- Section 8 comments upon Sub-Regional, Regional and Inter-Regional Issues and clearly because of Huntingdonshire's location, at the north-western periphery of the region, these issues, particularly in terms of the relationship with Peterborough, will be of significant importance.
- Section 9 comments upon Infrastructure requirements and 'show-stoppers' and emphasises that the significant challenges that would come from any proposals to increase delivery above current growth levels.
- Section 10 comments upon the shared 'vision' of sustainable growth that has underpinned this work.

4.3 Further to the CReSSP meeting on the 7th April it is intended that the 'Cambridgeshire Development Study' will be considered by the County Council's Cabinet on 5th May 2009. The views of the County Council will then be submitted to EERA as the initial aspect of Cambridgeshire's response to the request for 4/4 Authority advice to inform the RSS Review. However, it is important to note that this is obviously an initial position that will be subject to further public and statutory consultation, and far greater scrutiny, when EERA, after they have considered the advice they will have received from all of its constituent 4/4 authorities, publish their proposed 'options' for growth later in the year.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Therefore it is recommended that Cabinet:

- a. Notes the positive partnership working that has taken place between all of the Cambridgeshire Authorities with regard to developing a co-ordinated response to these fundamentally important strategic planning issues.
- b. Endorses the on-going assessment work that is being commissioned to consider in more detail the potential environmental capacity and implications of further strategic growth in Huntingdonshire.
- c. Requests that the County Council Cabinet takes appropriate account of HDC's statements of support and its stated concerns as set out in Paragraph 4.2 of this report and that it accordingly amends the basis of its suggested advice to EERA.
- d. Supports the submission of a suitably amended Cambridgeshire position to EERA in response to their request for initial strategic planning advice from the 4/4 Authorities.

Background Papers:

Joint Cambridgeshire Regional Spatial Strategy Review Panel – Applicable RSS Review Papers and in particular the relevant agenda items from the 7th April 2009 meeting.

The Cambridgeshire Development Study – April 2009

EERA – Regional Scale Settlement Study – Final Report – January 2009

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