

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANEL 1

**Held on Tuesday, 24 July 2007 at 10.00 am in
Regency Room, The Assembly Rooms, Market Place, Swaffham**

PRESENT

Mr J.D. Rogers (Chairman)	Mrs P. Quadling
Mr A.P. Joel (Vice-Chairman)	Mrs P.A. Spencer
Mr K. Martin	Mrs L.S. Turner

Also Present

Mrs D.K.R. Irving	Mrs A.L. Steward
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In Attendance

Mark Broughton	- Scrutiny Officer
Paul Harris	- Planning Policy Officer
Andrea Long	- Environmental Planning Manager
Stephen McGrath	- Principal Committee Officer
David Spencer	- Senior Planning Policy Officer
Elaine Wilkes	- Senior Committee Officer

39/07 MINUTES

Minute 34/07 was corrected by the addition of Mr A.P. Joel's name to the list of apologies for absence.

With regard to Minute 37/07, the Chairman corrected this item to clarify that all the addresses concerned were in the parish of Carbrooke but with the exception of one, all were classified as Watton for postal purposes. It also gave rise to children being sent to Watton schools instead of to the local school in Carbrooke.

Subject to the above corrections, the minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2007 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

40/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr R.P. Childerhouse and Mr P.J. Duigan.

41/07 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The Chairman declared the following interests:

- Agenda Item 6 – Personal interest by virtue of the fact that he was in the process of submitting an application site for inclusion in the Breckland Local Development Framework but, as no site specific decisions were being considered under this item, there was no prejudicial interest at this stage and he would remain in the meeting.

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- Agenda item 7 – Personal interest by virtue of his position as Vice-Chairman of the County Council's Planning Regulatory Committee governing waste and minerals.

42/07 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING

The following Members were in attendance:

- Mrs A. Steward – Executive Member for Housing and Planning.
- Mrs D. Irving

**43/07 BRECKLAND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
PROGRESS REPORT AND UPDATE ON RECENT BEST
PRACTICE AND ADVICE (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

The Principal Planning Officer presented the report, which informed Members of progress on the Breckland Local Development Framework (LDF) and the latest best practice and advice on how to prepare the LDF and the new spatial planning agenda. Additionally, the report assessed Breckland's progress on its LDF in relation to surrounding authorities. The report also re-affirmed the key tests to which every LDF, including Breckland's, would be subject through the independent Examination process and drew out examples from those authorities who had so far failed to deliver a sound LDF.

The fact that guidance accompanying the 2004 Planning Act was continuing to evolve had impinged on progress of the LDF and there was a requirement to incorporate spatial planning within the LDF. This was a new element, moving away from the solely land-use planning approach which had previously underpinned the Local Plan system. In essence, spatial planning involved:

- Integrating policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes
- Having a vision based on sound evidence, local distinctiveness and community objectives
- Recognising the LDF is not exclusively a technical planning document but the local authority's central delivery document, alongside the Sustainable Community Strategy
- Having aspirations for communities but also having a realistic and clear delivery framework

Breckland's spatial planning would be informed by the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), the adoption of which would be delayed until autumn 2007 at the earliest to allow further time for impact assessments on European Habitats in the Region (a process known as Appropriate Assessment). This work would be critical to the Breckland context given the proximity of European Habitats to Thetford and that Breckland would need the clarity of the Regional Appropriate Assessment to advance its own LDF.

It was explained that, although the authority was in the third year of the new system and it was appreciated that there was some anxiety over the time being taken to produce the LDF,

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nevertheless Breckland was making reasonable progress in the local context and there were a number of factors which had influenced the position and needed to be taken into account. These included:

- Delays to the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), as mentioned above.
- Evolving Government guidance since the introduction of the Regulations to the new 2004 Planning Act resulting in a shift of emphasis towards the development of more detailed and site specific Core Strategies within the LDF, where previously the advice proposed a more strategic and visionary approach to the LDF, where much of the detail would have been delegated to into site specific documents, area action plans and other supplementary documents.
- Developing and maintaining an up-to-date evidence base to meet new requirements. Breckland had made considerable progress in producing the required evidence base but there was a need now to update parts of that to meet the latest Government guidance (i.e. Appropriate Assessment). The volume of work necessary to satisfy the Appropriate Assessment was considerable and various research projects were under way involving the RSPB and Forestry Commission.
- The LDF would become a key delivery mechanism for the Sustainable Community Strategy. The Breckland Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) had committed to the refresh of the existing Community Strategy into a Sustainable Community Strategy by early 2008. The preparation of both the LDF and the Sustainable Community Strategy needed to be closely aligned and to share a joint evidence base on the characteristics of the area. A temporary Research Officer post was therefore to be appointed for a three-month contract over the summer to refine and update existing evidence collated to date.
- Staff turnover and resource was a critical element. The core team delivering the LDF consisted of two full-time officers, supported by the Environmental Planning Officer. Two planning policy officers had left the team over the last five months due to promotion, which reflected the current competitive market for planners. Recruitment and retention of planners was therefore an issue of risk to delivering the LDF.

These key factors were reflected in the timetable for the preparation of the LDF, as set out in the report.

Latest best practice and advice resulting from earlier LDF submissions by other authorities around the country showed that:

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- Evidence needed to be submitted with the document, not hastily prepared as an afterthought once the document had been written.
- Core strategies needed to add a local dimension to regional or national guidance and policy.
- Spatial planning needed to be included; delivery was as critical as the use of land.
- Core Strategies should pinpoint specific sites rather than suggest general aspirations.
- Self-assessment should be a continual part of the process, not an add-on at the end.

Breckland was addressing the lessons learnt by other authorities.

The report also outlined the responses received to the LDF Development Choices consultation. In summary, the consultation was successful in providing additional detail on choices around the development strategy and the responses would enable the production of a more responsive and deliverable LDF.

The consultation revealed that the strategy options and level of development earmarked for the towns was on the right lines and deliverable. There was a need to look more closely at Attleborough and its transport issues and the presence of European habitats close to Thetford. There was widespread agreement that the LDF needed to look beyond 2021 to 2026 to ensure housing was delivered and there was long-term certainty about where development will occur. Options regarding reducing the density of developments in the villages to as low as 22 homes per hectare (9 per acre) and increasing parking in residential areas to reflect local circumstances also received significant endorsement.

Further work and more evidence was clearly needed around which villages should be identified as 'Local Service Centres' and how the LDF was going to address concerns about rural housing needs. A number of alternative Local Service Centre villages have been suggested (i.e. Bawdeswell, Shropham, Litcham) and this was balanced by comments in support of protecting the rural areas and limiting new development. In conclusion, the consultation did not reveal any major showstoppers at this stage which would prevent the delivery of a development strategy in broad alignment with that which was consulted on.

The following were the 'tests of soundness' that would be examined by the Planning Inspectorate against the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies document when it was submitted to the Secretary of State:

- 1 How the proposed change relates to the core strategy (unless it is the core strategy development plan document).

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- 2 How it related to the Community Strategy.
- 3 Whether it would be in general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy and be consistent with national planning policy.
- 4 Whether it was consistent with any other development plan document.
- 5 Whether it was consistent with other relevant plans and strategies which would affect the delivery of the policies in the plan, e.g. local transport plans.
- 6 Whether it had any environmental, economic or social implications that had not already been covered in the sustainability appraisal.
- 7 Whether the proposed change required the preparation of a revised sustainability appraisal; if so whether this had been done or, if not, how it was to be done.
- 8 What further consultation had been undertaken by the local planning authority in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement.

Failure to submit a 'sound' document could result in either a binding Inspector's Report with fundamental changes, or a Direction that the authority prepares, at its own expense, another document for submission.

The proposed timetable for Breckland's LDF provided for:

- The adoption of the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies document by early 2009.
- The adoption Site Specifics document by end of 2010.
- The adoption of a Thetford Area Action Plan by end of 2010.

A copy of the revised timetable as tabled at the meeting is appended to these minutes.

A member asked whether there would be a policy gap between the expiration of the existing Local Plan in September this year and the adoption of the LDF. In reply, the Environmental Planning Manager explained that there was a mechanism in place to extend the use of planning policies for Development Control decisions. The Government was also encouraging the use of national planning guidance. Guidance was still being obtained on what was needed in this regard and a further report would be brought to the Panel at a future date. It was stressed, however, that there would not be a 'policy gap' and that there would be a policy framework to enable planning applications to be

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determined. This would be achieved through the use of existing Local Plan policies that were still relevant combined with national planning guidance where this superseded existing policies.

The Environmental Planning Manager added that many authorities were in the same position as Breckland, some of whom had much older Local Plans than Breckland's. She also explained that while it would be possible to write some interim policies should it be felt necessary, they would, however, be given no weight by the Planning Inspectorate.

Another question concerned national policy guidance placing responsibility on local authorities to determine development on flood plains. The Environmental Planning Manager replied that the Council had carried out a flood risk assessment and that this was in the process of being re-assessed in the light of new guidance issued last year. However, some issues with flood plains concerned not so much their being built upon but more in relation to the fact that flood defences were not put in place in conjunction with such development. A key issue for authorities, therefore, was how to put in and manage appropriate protection measures. The view had also been taken not to permit developments in core river valleys.

The Environment Agency had been given a strengthened consultative role and a local authority would have to give very good reasons should it want to grant permission for development on a flood plain against the advice of the Environment Agency.

It was suggested it would be helpful for all members to have a copy plan of flood plains in their areas which could be used for reference purposes in their constituency roles. The Environmental Planning Manager agreed this was something that could be provided once the latest information was to hand.

A member drew attention to the issue of Thetford Growth Point Status and asked about the relationship between the various working and consultative groups and this Panel.

The Environmental Planning Manager explained that she was involved with all the groups to provide continuity with the LDF and the wider planning policy team to ensure emerging policies were complementary. The role of the Thetford Growth Point Status groups included wider funding issues.

The importance of close working between all the relevant agencies was endorsed by the Executive Member for Housing and Planning.

With regard to Local Service Centres, the Chairman highlighted the status of Carbrooke, which he felt was as large, if not larger, than some of the other villages identified for Local Service Centre classification. It was explained that the villages mentioned in the report were examples only at this stage and that more work was being done in this area. A report would be made to the Panel in due course.

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So far as public consultation on progress of the LDF was concerned, it was confirmed that more and better use of communications media, including Breckland Voice and the use of newsletters, was being planned to keep members and the public informed of issues and progress with the LDF.

The Executive Member added that the issue of resources was also being addressed and other avenues of assistance being utilised wherever possible, including closer working with the County Council.

In response to a question about how other neighbouring authorities' LDF programmes affected Breckland, it was explained that two-way consultation would take place to ensure each was aware of the other's policies and programme etc.

In concluding the item, the Chairman thanked the officers for their attendance and it was

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

**44/07 NORFOLK MINERALS AND WASTE DEVELOPMENT
FRAMEWORK - DRAFT CORE STRATEGY AND POLICIES -
ISSUES AND OPTIONS MAY 2007 (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

The Principal Planning Officer presented the report, which summarised details of the content of the recent draft Norfolk Minerals and Waste Development Framework (NMWDF) prepared by the County Council and the subject of consultation. As the Local Planning Authority, it was important that Breckland Council was aware of the County's plans for minerals and waste and how this affected Breckland's LDF Strategy, policies and sites.

The NMWDF was due to be adopted by April 2009. The NMWDF had two functions: (1) to plan for how much waste was produced in the County and how it was dealt with, and (2) how much mineral extraction was needed to meet the scale of proposed growth (both in terms of population growth and new homes and infrastructure). Like the Breckland LDF, the County NMWDF would include a separate Site Specifics document outlining the proposed sites for mineral extraction and waste processing and a draft of this document was due in spring 2008.

Key issues highlighted in the NMWDF were:

- Ensuring sufficient and adequate provision of minerals and waste
- Reduce the transport impact of minerals and waste
- Protect the environment
- Reduce climate gases arising from minerals and waste developments
- Promote employment in minerals and waste
- Reduce health impacts from minerals and waste

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Strategy options were:

- Focus minerals and waste development to regional centres (Norwich, King's Lynn, Great Yarmouth and Thetford)
- A more decentralised option where other towns in Norfolk would accommodate waste facilities and mineral supply depots
- A localised option, where villages would also form part of the hierarchy and could accommodate local facilities for waste and minerals

So far as minerals were concerned, the supply in Norfolk was varied. National and regional policy expected local authorities to maximise the use of recycled aggregates in building products. The County Council's preferred way forward for minerals included:

- Ensure the County land bank for minerals was above the national requirement
- Require greater use of recycled aggregates in developments
- To ensure minerals are extracted place no restriction on the size of mineral development approval

In addressing waste, the NMWDF proposed to:

- Require developer contributions from waste proposals towards local waste minimisation schemes
- Encourage waste recovery methods dependent on their carbon footprint
- Encourage energy from waste (anaerobic digestion, landfill gas, thermal treatment)
- Only allow for new landfill where capacity fell below a certain threshold

So far as transport issues were concerned, the NMWDF proposed to reduce demand for travel by

- Allocating minerals and waste sites close to the markets they would primarily serve
- Giving priority to sites that had the most potential to enable the use of rail and water-borne freight
- Avoiding minerals and waste developments where road safety and road width (less than 6.1m) were known issues and giving priority to sites that accessed directly on to the designated HGV route hierarchy

With regard to the environment, the County Council was proposing that the balance between environmental protection and the need for mineral and waste development in Norfolk could be achieved as follows:

- Avoid SSSIs unless there was overriding public interest
- Avoid regional and local sites of nature conservation/geological value unless the benefits of

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- development clearly outweighed the impact
- Do not permit development that would lead to loss of Biodiversity Action Plan habitat or species
- Development would not be permitted in core river valleys (not defined)
- Development would not be permitted on Grade 1, 2 and 3a agricultural land
- Restoration of sites would give priority to biodiversity and landscape enhancement and the creation of ecological networks

An analysis and suggested response to the draft NMWDF was given in Section 6 of the officer's report. In summary, the views were as follows:

Minerals

- a) To support the County Council's option for a more decentralised approach to mineral development, having particular regard to the proposed scale of growth in Breckland, with particular reference to Thetford, Attleborough and Dereham.
- b) Given the finite amount of developable land available for Thetford, primary mineral extraction close to Thetford would potentially limit the expansion of the town and undermine the Growth Point Status and objective to accelerate housing growth at a sustainable location. The NMWDF needed to recognise this issue.
- c) The vernacular in Breckland was sustained by many local minerals, including flint, chalk and carrstone, some of which were still extracted in Breckland and it was important that future supplies of these materials were recognised and protected in the NMWDF.

Waste

- a) Noting the need for further capacity and solutions for Thetford and for the Dereham area. On this basis, Breckland would support the County Council's option of a more decentralised approach to waste developments.
- b) Support the options for the proposed waste hierarchy, although more consideration needs to be given to the environmental impact around the thermal treatment of waste. Proposals to reduce landfill and the transportation of waste out of the County should be supported provided there is no net increase in the carbon footprint.
- c) The NMWLDF needed to reflect the role of rural areas as part of the strategy for minerals and waste. In Breckland, parts of isolated former airfields have accommodated minerals developments (aggregate recycling) and waste transfer and sorting operations. The relative remoteness of these sites avoided direct conflict with local

communities, although the access to these sites required careful consideration. Additionally, the NMWDF should give greater support to the potential of suitably located agricultural buildings for waste and minerals purposes.

Environment

- a) The strong emphasis on environmental protection is supported given the significant number of SSSI and local wildlife sites in Breckland. The presence of a large number of international nature conservation sites in Breckland needed to be noted in the NMWDF and addressed through Appropriate Assessment. With regard to river valleys and bearing in mind that a number in Breckland had already been exploited for minerals development, Breckland should strongly support that all river valleys in Breckland are identified as core river valleys and given appropriate protection. This would include the Wensum, Wissey, Nar, Yare, Thet and Little Ouse valleys.
- b) It was noted that the document did not address the issue of nuclear waste. The Panel noted the officers' comments and agreed that the County Council should be asked if it was intended to address the matter in the NMWDF.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and the analysis as set out in section 6 of the report form the basis of the Council's response to the draft Norfolk Minerals and Waste Local Development Framework Issues and Options document.

45/07 POSTAL ADDRESSES AT CARBROOKE/WATTON (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Scrutiny Officer reported the reply received from Royal Mail on the question raised at the last meeting. The Chairman's comments noted above (minute 39/07) clarifying the issue were noted.

The Chairman reiterated that he was continuing to press the point with Royal Mail that parish names should be included in postal addresses.

The point was made that there was nothing to stop people adding the parish name into their postal address if this was not already the case.

The position was noted.

46/07 WORK PROGRAMME AND MEETING SCHEDULE (AGENDA ITEM 9)

Items currently listed in the Panel's programme were confirmed as:

- LDF and associated issues (ongoing)
- New Planning Regulations – when developed

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- Regional Framework – interrelation with LDF and compatibility of policies

The following additional matters were put forward for inclusion in the programme:

- Update on progress of Thetford Growth Point project in relation to development of the LDF. Representatives of Thetford Town Council and Norfolk County Council (as members of Moving Thetford Forward and associated Member Groups) to be invited to attend for discussions.
- Snetterton Electricity Supply project (part of REV project) – Update on progress requested.

Referring back to agenda item 7 and the consultation on options for waste within the NMWDF document, a member drew attention to the fact that only single loads were being accepted at the existing recycling centre in Thetford, which she felt was resulting in increases in fly tipping in and around the town. She felt this was something that needed to be reviewed.

Another member suggested that the interim solution used in Dereham, where lorries were parked on one day a week to take recycling waste, might be taken up elsewhere.

The Environmental Planning Manager felt it would be necessary to agree an additional meeting date towards the end of August to meet the existing LDF timetable.

RESOLVED that

- (1) an additional meeting date be agreed for 10.00am Thursday, 30 August 2007 (venue to be arranged);
- (2) the item on Thetford Growth Point Status be incorporated into the work programme;
- (3) an update on the Snetterton electricity supply issue be provided to this or other Panel as may be appropriate.

47/07 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 10)

As agreed under the foregoing item, the next meeting of the Panel would take place on Thursday, 30 August 2007 at 10.00am.

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The meeting closed at 11.25 am

CHAIRMAN