

# **BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

## **At a Meeting of the**

### **POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANEL 1**

**Held on Tuesday, 23 October 2007 at 10.00 am in  
Anglia Room, Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

#### **PRESENT**

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

#### **Also Present**

Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mrs D.K.R. Irving
Mr W.P. Borrett	Mr R. Kemp
Councillor Claire Bowes	Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris
Mr A.J. Byrne	Mr J.P. Labouchere
Mr J.P. Cowen	Mr B. Rose
Mr P.S. Francis	Mrs A.L. Steward
Mrs S.R. Howard-Alpe	

#### **In Attendance**

Mark Broughton	- Scrutiny Officer
Sam Hubbard	- Planning Policy Assistant
Ray Johnson	- Acting Operations Manager (Commercial Services)
Andrea Long	- Environmental Planning Manager
Darryl Smith	- Principal Housing Officer (Strategy and Enabling)
David Spencer	- Principal Planning Policy Officer
Nick Vass Bowen	- Senior Planning Policy Officer (Growth Point)
Elaine Wilkes	- Senior Committee Officer

#### **64/07 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **65/07 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr I. Monson, Mr P. Duigan, Mrs M. Chapman-Allen and Mrs P. Quadling.

#### **66/07 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

The following declarations in regard to agenda item 6 were made:

- Mr S.G. Bambridge – Personal interest from professional interest in LDF
- Mr J.P. Cowen – Personal interest as Architect in practice in relation to LDF and planning matters
- Councillor C. Bowes – Personal interest as owns land in Watton
- Mr R. Childerhouse – Personal interest as family are landowners in the district

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**Action By**

- Mr J.R. Rogers – Personal & prejudicial interest in relation to LDF matters relating to Carbrooke
- Mr J.P. Labouchere – Personal interest as landowner in North Elmham
- Mr W.P. Borrett – Personal interest as business company has made representations in regard to the LDF
- Mr A. Byrne – Personal interest as property owner in Snetterton

**67/07 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING**

The following members were in attendance for agenda item 6:

Mr S.G. Bambridge  
Mr W.P. Borrett  
Councillor Claire Bowes  
Mr A.J. Byrne  
Mr J.P. Cowen  
Mr P.S. Francis  
Mrs S.R. Howard-Alpe  
Mrs D.K.R. Irving  
Mr R. Kemp  
Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris  
Mr J.P. Labouchere  
Mr B. Rose  
Mrs A.L. Steward – Executive Member (Planning & Housing)

**68/07 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK (LDF): BRECKLAND CORE STRATEGY AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL POLICIES DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT (DPD) - PREFERRED POLICY OPTIONS CONSULTATION (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

The Environmental Planning Manager introduced the report, which was to go forward to Cabinet on 20<sup>th</sup> November for approval to consult on a series of Preferred Policy Options (Reg. 26) for the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Development Plan Document that would form part of the Local Development Framework (LDF).

The Options had been devised following extensive community and stakeholder consultation during 2005 and 2007.

The proposed consultation period would run for a minimum period of six weeks and the results would be reported back to members in due course, prior to submitting a final document to the Government later in 2008.

Members' views were being sought on the Core Strategy and suggested Preferred Policy Options, which would form the Council's broad overarching strategy for the next 20 years.

The report set out the background and policy framework against which the Core Strategy and policies were being developed, which had to be consistent with the Statement of Community Involvement, together with details of the consultations undertaken to date; the background to the preferred policy options (Reg. 26)

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and sustainability appraisal, as well as the tests of soundness against which the policies would be examined by the Planning Inspectorate.

The life of the Development Plan had been extended from 2021 to 2026 to take in the new Government guidance under PPS3 for a 15 year land supply for housing; this proposal had been consulted on and agreed previously.

Copies of the supporting documents folders were circulated to members at the meeting. Members were asked to retain their copies of all documents for reference purposes at succeeding meetings.

Consideration was then given to the following elements of the Development Plan, as outlined in the Executive Summary for Members (Appendix 2 of the report) and detailed in Appendix 3 (Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Preferred Options 2007). The debate took the form of members' comments, questions and answers, the main points arising from which are summarised as follows:

**Spatial Vision for Breckland to 2026**

- Delivery of the aims under the Spatial Vision would flow through the wider strategic objectives and core policies contained in Appendix 3, which had been drafted and designed to deliver the strategy. Added to this, delivery went beyond sole issues of land use within Breckland; it had to be balanced with consideration by the other authorities and agencies that had responsibility for delivery of certain elements of the strategy.
- Of the target for delivery of 19,000 new homes in the period to 2026, existing allocations (including those completed and with existing planning permission) totalled some 10,841, which meant that the requirements for new sites amounted to approximately 11,000. Of these, 6,000 were targeted for Thetford and the remaining 5,000 targeted in the remainder of the district.
- Concern was raised that the 'Green Agenda' was not sufficiently embedded within the core strategy and its policies. It was explained that additional and more detailed information in relation to this would be given and considered as part of the submission of the Development Control Policies.
- Sustainability
  - There was a feeling that rural communities could be put at a disadvantage from the apparent emphasis being given to the five towns.
  - There needed to be opportunities for people to live and work in the rural villages. What level of commercial growth was being allowed for?

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- Notwithstanding national policy, a view was strongly put that for rural Breckland, the motor car had to be seen as the only sustainable mode of transport.
- Public transport was also a fundamental issue for rural communities.
- How was a sustainable village defined?

In response, it was stated that the definition of sustainability in the Breckland context was well evidenced in the document and the issue of sustainable modes of transport would be considered as part of the consideration of the detailed policies. However, it had to be recognised that it was difficult to relate national policy on sustainability to the local area, particularly in an area as rural as Breckland. Notwithstanding this, the opportunity was being taken, where possible, to push out the boundaries in that respect in the policies, for example on local service centres, parking, barn conversions, etc. and that where needs were shown and backed by evidence, these were included in the document.

The fundamental question of public transport in the rural areas was recognised. In this connection, the role of local services centres would impinge on that of other service providers, to ensure service provision was maintained. Use of the objectives of the LDF was to ensure as many people as possible live close to where they can access services and the overall distances travelled to access services are reduced.

There was no formal definition for sustainable villages and decisions on village guidelines had not yet been determined.

- o Employment
  - Key role of A11 corridor and the ratio between houses and jobs for Attleborough over the life of the plan in comparison to Thetford.
- o Housing
  - A concern was raised that the figures for housing after those for the towns were deducted appeared to leave a shortage for service centres and that the Council could find itself trying to accommodate some 700 units per annum across the rural villages to meet the overall housing target; while some hamlets could accommodate small numbers of units, others had no further capacity.

**Spatial Strategy**

**Attleborough and Thetford**

- o Employment
  - The figures for new jobs for Attleborough were questioned. A member considered that these would equate to 70 per annum rather than the 200-300 stated.

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- While there were very specific figures for retail floor space, the spatial strategy for Attleborough contained no specifics for the industrial park or further space. How much was zoned or what was needed in Attleborough to achieve the Spatial Strategy?
- There was reference to a new business park for Thetford but employment specifics appeared vague.
- Economic growth needed to be well balanced and related to the towns.
- There was insufficient indication on specific land releases in the economic plan.
- The existence of a good railway line with links to Norwich and Cambridge would influence the area as a commuter belt.

Regarding Thetford, it was explained that there was a lot more work to be undertaken in regard to the Growth Point Programme. At this stage, the strategy gave broad job figures and the further work would take this forward to translate the space requirements, needs and deliverables through the Thetford Area Action Plan.

It was clarified that the employment figure for Attleborough was some 70 jobs per annum, bearing in mind this was net job growth, allowing for restructuring within the economy.

Employment figures should be treated very much as minimum net figures. There would be some flexibility and flux in net jobs growth coming out of consultations with agencies and employers, which would need to be translated into specific land releases. It was considered that there could be significant additional land release in Snetterton and Attleborough. More detail would also come forward at the site specifics stage.

- o Infrastructure
  - There was a strong concern about the ability to deliver the LDF given the constraints from lack of infrastructure for transport, drainage/sewerage capacity, schools and power. It was felt there were serious inconsistencies in the plan in this regard, with implications for all the towns and employment. It was felt the Council should be the driver behind the utilities and other infrastructure agencies/providers in enabling delivery of the plan.
  - How could utilities providers be persuaded to put in infrastructure ahead of development?
  - Firms would not commit themselves to an area unless all facilities were in place. Without the basic infrastructure, economic development would be constrained.

Infrastructure was one of the key issues for the District. It needed to keep pace and there was a high interaction with providers. There were emerging constraints which needed to be worked through; if not, problems would be exacerbated. From the LDF dialogue, it was made known to providers where the needs for infrastructure were and where they needed to match their capital

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programmes to those needs, e.g. schools, drainage, etc. The Council was working with them to ensure facilities could be phased in at the right places and at the right times.

A bid for funding for infrastructure to support the Thetford Growth Point Programme had been made and work was being done to identify gaps in infrastructure, particularly regarding funding, which was a complex area. The Government promoted developer contributions.

There were a number of operators in key utility areas and there were differing regulatory provisions governing their funding of schemes.

While there were critical issues, they were not considered to be insurmountable and an implementation and monitoring framework was being introduced, which would flag up infrastructure issues, risk and contingencies etc.

Other than continuing to work with the utility companies and other infrastructure providers to secure provision of services, the alternatives appeared to be either to not grant planning permissions until the required infrastructure was in place, or to force the issue by granting all applications – this would not be (e.g. Anglian Water) without risk in terms of exacerbating existing infrastructure deficits.

It was recognised that commercial companies would not commit themselves to moving to an area until infrastructure was in place.

It was acknowledged there were difficulties in Snetterton regarding energy capacity and the power infrastructure there. The Council was working with developers to secure a solution.

Dereham/Swaffham/Watton

- Infrastructure
  - The housing target for Dereham equated to 59 houses per annum and this was felt to fall well short of what was needed but further growth was being constrained by the lack of High School facilities. A larger site was needed with capacity for growth over the life of the plan.
  - There appeared to be a serious mismatch between targets for jobs and houses in Dereham.
  - There needed to be new solutions on schools provision in Dereham, which were at capacity. The situation was similar for Watton. The Education Authority needed to actively respond to the District's plan.
  - Dereham was certain to grow further so the issues of schools and sewage treatment works needed to be addressed and other providers needed to have a strategy for that growth. The Council needed to be more proactive in seeking a strategic commitment from other service providers both for Dereham and generally.

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- Growth forecasts were based on historical formula. Population growth had expanded significantly from migrant workers coming into the area which would affect existing forecasts.
- Could Section 106 Agreements be used as an option for developer contributions towards overall infrastructure needs? Was there a set tariff for developer contributions for schools development?
- o Employment
  - Dereham attracted customers from outside the district, including from Norwich and Fakenham. The town therefore needed to be recognised as a service centre for the area outside Breckland.

In regard to the infrastructure at Dereham, it was explained that the constraints were linked to the fact that the High Schools were at maximum capacity. Both sites were landlocked with no room for further expansion. The solution was for greater town growth or to relocate an existing school to a new site where expansion could be factored in. There were difficulties with both options. The plan recognised the limits which would be subject to regular review during the life of the plan to take account of any changes.

The issue of an imbalance between employment/retail growth over homes in Dereham was a very local specific response to the factors affecting the town, including the growth in the commuting public. Also, Dereham had built up a retail offer and further retail development would build on this for the town and its surrounding villages.

Affordable housing delivery was a key issue in the whole LDF. A balance was needed. Around 1200 new homes per annum were required to meet total affordable housing requirements over the next five years; the Council was currently working to the overall 760 houses per annum in the Regional Plan. The issues regarding deliverability were recognised.

Regarding schools, funding came from new housing developments but was retrospective, i.e. the houses had to be built first. Current policy did not allow the County Council to borrow funding for schools.

There had been a lot of dialogue over the schools issue for Dereham. A new high school would require 6000 new homes to be built which would have to come from the overall housing allocation in the plan.

However, the issue of sewage capacity in the town was a significant factor. The current sewage treatment works was at capacity and Anglia Water had nothing in their current programme to remedy the situation. Development of more than 1000 homes would require a new sewage treatment works to be built. It had to be recognised that there was a duty on the Council not to exacerbate an existing problem area.

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Capacity was a known factor from Norfolk County Council forecasts. The Core Strategy and development policies were setting markers and raising the issues with providers that needed to be resolved before the end of the plan period, which would be subject to review during the life of the plan.

Developer contributions for sewage treatment works and certain other facilities were not permissible under current regulations.

There was no blanket tariff for Section 106 Agreements. Contributions differed based on varies needs criteria. Breckland would shortly be reviewing its Section 106 policy.

The current County Council formula for schools development was 25 pupils per 100 houses for primary schools and 14 pupils per 100 houses for secondary schools. It was felt these figures might be reduced in the future.

**Service Centre Villages/Rural Settlements**

- Rural Settlements
  - There was a case to enable development in rural villages and settlements for people who live and work there.
  - Social housing should not be constrained to the towns; if affordable/social housing was not provided in rural communities, local people would be forced to move out.
  - Affordable housing should not simply be interpreted as meaning social housing. There were other options for providing rented accommodation. There needed to be flexibility for this in the villages. The policy appeared to put a focus on social housing only.
  - The need for families to be able to move from smaller to larger houses in their local community also had to be taken into account.
  - The need for personal choice also had to be available; not all people on low incomes wanted to live in towns.
  - Care was needed in the use of the term “infilling” and the policy to protect the form and character of an area. All infilling would affect the form and character of its surrounds. It might be more useful to define areas where development was not wanted.

The policy regarding rural settlements would not strike out or preclude development in rural areas but recognised the need for there to be balanced development, allowing for affordable housing to meet need and for legitimate business development in a rural location.

Away from service centre villages, settlement boundaries would include scope for development but on a scale to recognise the surroundings and character of the area.

It was considered that the policy did meet what was wanted but it was accepted that the wording of the policy could be clearer. The

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question of development criteria would be determined under the development control policies.

It was agreed there was a range of affordable housing options. The greatest need identified from the Housing Needs Survey was for rented / shared-ownership housing.

The Housing Needs Survey was a district-wide survey which identified a need for smaller units overall and that there was a need across the whole district for affordable/low cost housing. This sometimes conflicted with a parish council's view. There were also difficulties in matching needs with accessibility and sustainability issues. Housing through the open market was unlikely to help those in need of affordable/low cost housing.

- Service Centres
  - Would settlement boundaries be amended to allow for infilling in support of protecting existing centres?
  - A member questioned that the original candidate list of local service centres included Bawdeswell but that this was not included as a proposed service centre.
  - How would protection of service centres be achieved, given there were factors over which the Council had no control, e.g. post offices?
  - An unknown factor was where people would want to live in the future. When looking at the A11 corridor, there was housing need along this route but most of the villages served by it were not earmarked for growth.
  - On the provision for new jobs, there was a figure of 1500 for the rural areas but there was no reference to rural industrial estates, which could give a huge potential.

So far as the issue of settlement boundaries was concerned, there was a need for a debate about the need for them and their purpose. If they were to be retained, there would be opportunities to look at them when considering the site specific policies.

So far as the proposed list of service centres in the Strategy was concerned, this reflected the views of the Panel as part of the earlier consultation but ultimately it would be for members, through the Cabinet, to determine if the list of villages was right or needed to be amended.

The Strategy aimed to seek to protect service centres and was designed to give a positive approach to enable the Council to do what it could to sustain or maintain service provision in the rural areas.

As well as promoting the A11 corridor through a range of options, it provided for a key service centre at Harling, together with other centres at Old Buckenham and Banham, together with other villages where there would be opportunities for growth. The Strategy aimed to provide for a range of places where growth could or would take place.

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**Core Policies**

**CP1 Housing**

A member expressed the view that while he could see how the District target 40% affordable homes on developments fitted the larger villages and towns, he did not see that it would help provision in the smaller villages and questioned whether it would be possible to have a specific policy to address this point.

It was explained that the current local plan applied this target to developments of 25 or more houses in towns and 5 in the villages. The LDF proposed that the target be applied to developments of three or more dwellings and it was aimed that this would apply to both towns and villages for consistency.

Other members desired to see a greater mix of the range, size and conditions of housing in the towns and villages. It was suggested development in the towns should provide for more 'executive'-type houses, as it was felt there was a current over-development of same type/blocks of housing (Thetford was quoted as an example).

In response, it was stated that the range of documents through the LDF offered a number of ways to tackle specific sites. So far as Thetford was concerned, specific policies would be determined through the emerging Area Action Plan and Allocations document, based on evidence of need and site specific policies would dictate the mix.

**CP2 Gypsies and Travellers**

The requirement on Councils to provide sites for Gypsies and travellers was acknowledged.

**CP3 Employment**

The Environmental Planning Manager reported one amendment to the policy to include identification of land to the south of Weeting.

It was explained that the policy was designed very much around protecting existing employment sites.

A member commented that in supporting rural areas there needed to be more flexibility to meet local needs. Another member hoped that the plan did not limit development in rural areas to those specifically named areas.

**- Due to time constraints, the meeting was adjourned at this point, to be reconvened at the next scheduled meeting on 8 November 2007 -**

**69/07 WORK PROGRAMME**

Item deferred to the next meeting.

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**70/07 NEXT MEETING**

The arrangements for the next meeting on 8 November 2007 were noted. The meeting would conclude the adjourned items from agenda item 6 (Minute 68/07 above) and would consider the second part of the Preferred Options: Development Control Policies.

The meeting closed at 1.00 pm

CHAIRMAN