

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Environment – Ann Steward **Report of the Deputy Chief Executive** **Cabinet – 4th August 2009**

ADDITIONAL BUDGET PROVISION TO FUND THE DELIVERY OF THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this report

1. The purpose of this report is to secure Council's approval for the allocation of an additional £116,030 to the authority's planning budget in 2009-2010 to fund work required to maintain the momentum that has been gained on the delivery of Breckland's Local Development Framework ("LDF").

Recommendation

2. The Council approves the use of funding totalling £116,030 to fund work required to deliver the Breckland LDF in 2009 -2010.

Introduction

3. The production of the Council's Local Development Framework is progressing well. The Enquiry in Public into the soundness of the Core Strategy and the Council's detailed development control policies was scheduled to finish on 17th July 2009. The Thetford Area Action Plan and the Council's site specific policies are at an advanced stage of preparation, and work is about to commence on the preparation of an Area Action Plan for Attleborough.
4. It has not, however, been easy to build and maintain this momentum. Four factors, in particular, have stretched the planning service's resources to their limits. First, the negotiation and roll out of the Council's contract with Capita absorbed a considerable amount of officers' time and will continue to impact upon resource levels as the new arrangements settle down. Second, the uncertainty created by local government review and outsourcing has contributed to some key personnel leaving the authority, and, as members may be aware, the Director responsible for the Council's Planning Service was absent for 10 months through illness. Third, the Breckland LDF has thrown up a number of novel and complex technical issues relating to the European Habitats Regulations and protected birds, which have proved highly contentious and time consuming to resolve. Finally, the Inspector appointed to conduct the EIP into the Core Strategy and various statutory bodies (notably Natural England and the Environment Agency) have required the Council to bring forward or commission work that was either not envisaged, which the Council hoped to avoid or programmed to be obtained later in the LDF programme.
5. Officers have responded to the pressures described in the previous paragraph magnificently, their dedication being demonstrated by the routine working of very long hours, including evenings and over weekends and holidays for no additional remuneration. Work has continued to be produced to a very high standard and within deadlines and officers' commitment has undoubtedly saved the Council a substantial sum of money. It has also been possible to defray the cost of producing the LDF by contributions from Moving Thetford Forward and by the specific allocation of moneys to meet part the Inspector's fees. Nonetheless, the consequence of constraints, and

additional, unanticipated demands, on resources has been to place considerable pressure on a LDF budget. The result is that a further £116,030 is required in the current financial year.

Detailed breakdown of the budgetary position

6. Table 1 sets out the source and application of funds that Council has allocated to support the planning service in 2009-2010.

Table 1: Analysis of the requirement for a further budgetary allocation

Budget in 2009-2010

LDF production	182,370	
Hired services (Inspectors fees)	40,600	
Climate change moneys	45,000	
Programme officer	15,000	
Total		282,970

Committed Expenditure in 2009-2010

Energy study phase 2	45,000	
UEA birds study	80,000	
Inspector's fees	70,000	
Water cycle study phase 2	69,000	
Total		264,000

Further expenditure required in 2009-2010

Design statements for the TAAP	35,000	
Transport studies for Thetford and Attleborough	50,000	
Appropriate Assessment of TAAP	20,000	
Printing of LDF	30,000	
Total		135,000

Budgetary shortfall (116,000)

7. The list of commitments and items of further expenditure set out in Table 1 have been restricted to those things that must be done during the current financial year under contracts entered into with third parties and/or to deliver the LDF in accordance with the timetable that has been agreed by Council. It may be possible to offset the budgetary shortfall in 2 ways. First, the Council is exploring the possibility of sharing the contractual burden of studies into the impact of the LDF on protected species of birds with other local authorities who are confronted by the same issues, notably Forest Heath District Council and the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk. Second, certain of the studies listed above might properly be funded by Growth Point Moneys made available by the DCLG to support the expansion of Thetford. Such support would, however, need to be approved by the Moving Thetford Forward Board following a comprehensive review of the MTF revenue budget and programme, which is likely to be heavily committed to a range of other activities associated with the improvement of the town centre, the regeneration of neighbouring estates and improved educational provision for the town.

8. It is proposed to fund the shortfall of £116,030 as follows:-

CLG Extra Burden Grant	16,835
Planning Delivery Grant	12,500
Housing and Planning Delivery Grant	86,695

9. For the avoidance of doubt the additional budget allocation that is sought by this report will not be used to fund any increased payment to Messrs Capita under the contract for the provision of planning and building control services that commenced on 29th June 2009.

Section 151 Officer's comments

10. The Section 151 Officer has reviewed and supports the proposed funding of the budget shortfall from the sources specified under paragraph 8.

Options

11. Any work which could be deferred or might not be essential to the delivery of the LDF has been deleted from Table 1. There is thus no practicable alternative to allocating the additional budget that is sought if the Council wishes to adhere to the timetable that has been set for the delivery of the LDF Core Strategy, TAAP, AAAP and detailed site allocations.

Conclusion

12. The production of a LDF is a Council priority and is essential if the authority is to achieve a range of associated objectives, such as the provision of affordable housing, the creation of jobs for local people, the regeneration of Thetford, the protection of market towns and villages and the districts attractive landscape. The momentum that has been gained is threatened by an unforeseen demand for additional pieces of work coupled with a range of pressures on the in-house team. It is probable that some of the additional costs may be defrayed from other sources. Members are therefore asked to approve the allocation of a further £116,030 so that a robust LDF is delivered on time to the standard that the authority and local people expect.