

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

Cabinet – 11th January 2011

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive

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Thetford Area Action Plan - Draft Final version for Consultation (2011)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the approval of Cabinet to consult on the Thetford Area Action Plan – Final Draft consultation document. The Draft Final TAAP will contain land allocations and policies to guide the growth and regeneration of Thetford over the next 15-20 years. The results from the Final Draft consultation will influence the content of the Submission Version of the Thetford Area Action Plan.
- 1.2 The views and recommendations of Overview and Scrutiny Commission (6 December) the Moving Thetford Forward Board (15 December 2010) have been considered and taken into account as part of the overall consultation process. It is intended to undertake an extensive programme of public engagement including a summary leaflet and comments form sent to every home, with all feedback fully documented, assessed and presented as part of the final document.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the content of the Final Draft Thetford Area Action Plan, draft Housing Topic Paper and draft Commitments Paper for public consultation for a period of 4 weeks during February.

Note: In preparing this report, due regard has been had to equality of opportunity, human rights, prevention of crime and disorder, environmental and risk management considerations as appropriate. Relevant officers have been consulted in relation to any legal, financial or human resources implications and comments received are reflected in the report.

3. Information, Draft Final

3.1 Information

- 3.1.1 Breckland Council has an adopted Core Strategy which provides the overarching strategy for the district and sets the broad context for the remaining documents in the Local Development Framework (LDF). The Core Strategy provides strategic guidance to direct the preparation of subsequent Development Plan Documents (DPDs) such as Area Action Plans. The Council is also preparing in parallel the Site Specific Policies and Proposals DPD which deals with new allocations in the District other than in Thetford, Attleborough and Snetterton.
- 3.1.2 In the case of Thetford, the Council has specified that the detail of where growth will take place will be addressed through the preparation of an Area Action Plan. Therefore, to respond to the scale of growth and to carefully plan and manage this change, Breckland Council has committed to preparing an Area Action Plan which will, once adopted, form part of the statutory Development Plan for the area. The Area Action Plan will also incorporate parts of adjoining rural parishes, including the adjoining Parishes of Brettenham, Kilverstone and Croxton. The settlement boundary for Thetford will be addressed in this document. The changes proposed for the Croxton settlement boundary will be addressed through the Site Specifics DPD. Brettenham and Kilverstone do not have settlement boundaries.

- 3.1.3 The Final Draft consultation will be the Council's third dedicated consultation stage for the emerging Thetford AAP. The previous two stages were the Issues and Options (Summer 2008) and Preferred Options (Winter 2009) documents. The Final Draft TAAP has changed considerably from the previous Preferred Options as a result of the receipt of additional detailed evidence base as well as the representations made at the Preferred Options stage.
- 3.1.4 Following on from the Final Draft consultation, the next stage will be preparing the TAAP for submission for independent inspection. This pre-Submission Version of the TAAP will consider responses made at the Final Draft consultation stage. The Council Committee process, including MTF, will start again, and at that point a Full Council resolution to start the 6 week pre-submission consultation will be required.
- 3.1.5 Once the pre-Submission Version publication period has been completed, the Council will need to consider the representations received. Any minor factual amendments to the TAAP would not require further consultation and Full Council could resolve to submit the Final TAAP to the Government for inspection. Changes which are more than minor would require further consultation (another 6 week consultation period). As per other LDF documents, the Inspectors Report will be binding upon the Council.

3.2 **Background**

- 3.2.1 The Core Strategy identified Thetford for a significant level of new growth extending to the allocation of 6,500 new homes and the delivery of around 5,000 new jobs over the period to 2026. This is a significant level of growth and is likely to result in major change in the area. The Draft Final TAAP now seeks to allocate land for 5,000 dwellings to 2026 – the detail underpinning the proposed housing numbers is set out in the Housing Topic Paper at Appendix B accompanying this report.
- 3.2.2 During the Examination in Public into the Council's Core Strategy held during summer 2009, considerable attention was devoted to the discussion on the major growth proposed for Thetford. The Council had already developed a significant evidence base to support the growth in Thetford. However, Government guidance expects that Core Strategies are not normally the document within which high levels of detail are contained.
- 3.2.3 The Core Strategy specificity and clearly identifies the broad scale and direction of growth as well as highlighting critical infrastructure requirements that will be required to support and facilitate this growth. Members will also recall that many of the issues contained within the Draft Final TAAP have been the subject of consultation during the two previous rounds of consultation, although in some cases these policy areas have been further refined.
- 3.2.4 This means that the Area Action Plan has not been developed with an entirely blank canvas.

3.3 **The Purpose of the Draft Final consultation**

- 3.3.1 The purpose of this stage in the TAAP process is for the Council to set out its draft policies and land allocations. These will have to broadly conform with the Core Strategy as well as to national policy.
- 3.3.2 There are a number of policies that seek to address the existing and future issues in the town. There are also some additional policy areas included in the Draft Final document that directly respond to recent evidence base particularly in relation to transport issues.

3.3.3 As indicated above, the TAAP is not starting with a blank canvas and there are some options which will not be identified in the consultation as they would not accord with the adopted Core Strategy. An example of this is that the document will not seek a re-consideration of the principle of new housing north of the A11 which was dismissed by the Inspector in his Binding Report on the Core Strategy.

3.3.4 The proposed Draft Final document is included at Appendix A of this report. As stated elsewhere in this report, the Draft Final document has been considered and shaped by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and MTF over the Autumn and Winter.

3.4 Housing Topic Paper and Commitments Paper

3.4.1 To support the consultation and help the Council in understanding the consequences of the TAAP, a draft Housing Topic Paper and draft Commitments paper have been produced which provide further technical details to accompany the approach taken in the Draft Final TAAP. It is recommended that the Council consider the papers and that these should be published for consultation alongside the Draft Final document.

3.4.2 The draft Housing Topic Paper analyses the results of the constraints to development analysis. It provides background and rationale to the proposed housing allocation of 5,000 dwellings by 2026.

3.4.3 The draft Commitments Paper highlights the consequences of the TAAP. It talks of further work required to aid the delivery of the TAAP. This includes:

- Updates of evidence base
- A range of further transport work
- Green Infrastructure projects
- Town Centre Masterplan
- Reviewing the TAAP.

3.5 Proposed Consultation Programme

3.5.1 Public consultation is key to the preparation of any Development Plan Document. It gives the public a chance to have a say on documents containing policies that will shape the future of where they live, helps improve the document and policies and can help examinations in public run smoothly. With the emerging Localism Agenda, and the existing Regulations that govern the production of LDF documents, consultation is essential.

3.5.2 The Draft Final consultation would be for 4 weeks and could commence at the end of January or start of February. The exact format of consultation is yet to be finalised but subject to Member agreement could include summary leaflets going to every household as well as neighbouring parishes, open days, involving young people and the migrant population. The main document will also be available on line. Whilst this is the Draft Final TAAP, it is worth emphasising that this stage is bona fide consultation and the responses received will be read and considered: comments will be logged with officer responses and recommendations to MTF and the Council, and eventually be placed on the website.

3.6 Other Issues

3.6.1 Capita Symonds recommends that the Council uses this opportunity to gauge views on the draft policies that will guide the growth and regeneration of Thetford.

3.6.2 The TAAP will also be subject to Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment. The SA will be consulted on at the same time as the Final Draft TAAP. The draft HRA will also be available for the public to view.

3.7 Summary Conclusion

3.7.1 The Final Draft document presented at Appendix A reflects the evidence gathered to date to inform the TAAP and the Core Strategy, consistency with other existing policies and strategies (at national level) and as such contains a range of reasonable options to go forward for further consultation. This Draft Final document is intended to be as detailed and comprehensive as possible and will ultimately be a planning document used by Development Control to assess Planning Applications.

3.6.1 Generally, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and MTF Board have endorsed the document although a number of detailed changes have been incorporated following recommendations from these meetings.

3.7 Next Steps

3.7.1 If approved by Cabinet, the Area Action Plan will be subject to the Final Draft consultation outlined in this report and the responses will be recorded, analysed and presented to MTF.

3.7.2 The consultation responses, will be considered and inform the pre-Submission Version of the TAAP upon which representations will be consulted for a 6 week period. The comments from that 6 week consultation will be assessed and the decision to either change and reconsult or submit will be made.

3.7.3 Eventually it is anticipated that the Final TAAP will be submitted for examination in public – Spring/Summer 2011.

3.8 Options

3.8.1 There are two options presented in respect of this report. These are as follows:

- A) Cabinet are requested to consider the contents of this report and agree the document, draft Housing Topic Paper and draft Commitments paper, subject to any changes, for consultation for a period of four weeks starting at the end of January 2011.
- B) An alternative option is not to agree a document for consultation.

3.8.2 It is recommended that Cabinet endorse Option A above. Members are also advised that option B presents considerable risks to the Council as failure to make good progress with Area Action Plan could result in the location of housing being determined through early applications for development without the appropriate contributions to the required strategic infrastructure for the town.

3.9 Reason For Recommendation

3.9.1 The recommendation to endorse option A is to ensure the Thetford Area Action Plan document is presented for public consultation in accordance with the Council's adopted Local Development Scheme timetable.

4. Risk and Financial Implications

4.1 Risk

4.1.1 A Risk Management questionnaire has been completed and confirms that risk has been given careful consideration, and that there are no significant risks identified associated with the information in this report.

4.2 Financial

4.2.1 This report has no direct financial implications – i.e. it does not request funding. The LDF production budget for 2010/11 as well as MTF funding includes an allowance for this consultation. It should be noted that the draft commitments paper (accompanying this report) sets out how the TAAP can be delivered and does require various organisations and Councils to commit to various tasks to deliver the TAAP.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 Statutory Instrument 2008 No. 1371 Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008 sets out the procedures to which the LDF process must adhere.

a) **6. Other Implications**

b) Equalities: None

c) Section 17, Crime & Disorder Act 1998: None

d) Section 40, Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006: None

e) Human Resources: None

f) Human Rights: None

Other: None

7. Alignment to Council Priorities

7.1 PPS12 deals with the Local Development Framework, including arrangements for consultation and participation. The statement will need to be taken into account throughout the production of the Local Development Framework and its components and will be relevant to the following Council priorities:

- Building Safer and Stronger Communities
- Environment
- Prosperous Communities

8. Ward/Community Affected

8.1 This report directly affects the Wards of Thetford Guildhall, Thetford Abbey, Thetford Castle and Thetford Saxon, Weeting and Harling and Heathlands

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Key Decision Status (Executive Decisions only):

This is a key decision as indicated on the Forward Plan.

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A – Draft Final Thetford Area Action Plan and accompanying maps (walking and cycling network, Thetford Loops, masterplan and phasing, Proposals Map, inset map and legend.

Appendix B – Housing Topic Paper

Appendix C – Commitments Paper

Appendix D – Sustainability Appraisal