

BRECKLAND COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 1 – 24th JULY 2007

REPORT OF THE OPERATIONS MANAGER - ENVIRONMENT
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NORFOLK MINERALS AND WASTE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
DRAFT CORE STRATEGY AND POLICIES – ISSUES AND OPTIONS MAY 2007

Summary: This report informs Members of the content of the recent draft Norfolk Minerals and Waste Development Framework prepared by the County Council and the subject of consultation. As the Local Planning Authority it is important that Breckland Council is aware of the County plans for Minerals and Waste and how this affects the Strategy, policies and sites in the Breckland Local Development Framework. The document runs to 106 pages and is accompanied by two supporting volumes. These are not reproduced with this report but can be viewed on-line at www.norfolk.gov.uk.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 County Councils retain the role of Minerals and Waste Planning Authority. Part of this responsibility is to prepare a Minerals and Waste Local Development Framework (MWLDF) which has two functions: (1) to plan for how much waste is produced in the County and how it is dealt with; and (2) how much mineral extraction is needed. Both these issues are critical in the context of the growth in Norfolk up to 2021 as provided for in the Regional Plan. The scale of growth is 78,700 new homes (including 15,200 in Breckland) and this will result in a County population growth from 824,200 in 2005 to 871,300 in 2021. At one end aggregates will be needed as raw materials to deliver the new homes and infrastructure and at the other end waste production needs to be carefully managed and dealt with.
- 1.2 The County Council started work on its MWLDF in 2005 including an earlier Issues and Options consultation in December 2005. Like a number of planning authorities, the County Council has taken stock of recent national events in the preparation of LDFs and has decided to re-start its work and re-consult on a revised Issues and Options Paper for the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies. The document is due to be adopted by April 2009. Like the Breckland LDF, the County MWLDF will include a separate Site Specifics document outlining the proposed sites for mineral extraction and waste processing and a draft of this document is due in Spring 2008.

2. KEY DECISION

- 2.1 This is not a key decision.

3. EQUALITIES, HUMAN RIGHTS AND CRIME & DISORDER

- 3.1 This report raises no issues relating to Equalities, Human Rights and Crime and Disorder.

4. COUNCIL PRIORITIES

- 4.1 The matters raised in this report fall within the following Council priority:
- A well planned place to live which encourages vibrant communities

5. SUMMARY OF DOCUMENT

General

- 5.1 The over-arching strategy/vision is to make Norfolk a leader in recycling and reducing waste. Minerals will increasingly be sourced from recycled aggregates and where primary extraction will only be permitted where it leads to biodiversity and landscape enhancements. Critically, minerals and waste provision will be needed to help deliver sustainable growth in Norfolk. The key issues are:
- 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

Options for the Strategy

- 5.2 With minerals it is very difficult to control where they are extracted as deposits will need to be mined where they occur. There is however an element of control on where aggregates are stored and where they are distributed. With waste there is greater control over planning how much waste is produced and how and where it is processed/managed. The draft MWLDF presents three strategic options for minerals and waste development:
- Focus minerals and waste development to regional centres (Norwich, Kings 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 localised facilities for waste and minerals.

Minerals Landbank

- 5.3 The supply of minerals in Norfolk is varied. Landbanks of sand and gravel are low (approximately 5½ years worth) and do not meet the national requirement for at least 7 years supply. There is therefore a need to release more land for sand/gravel extraction. Crushed rock is more abundant in Norfolk with a 16 year landbank, compared to national requirements for a 10 year landbank. There are also modest supplies of chalk, silica sand and other minerals in Norfolk and it may be appropriate to develop a landbank for these. Increasingly there will be a need to encourage greater use of recycled aggregates. National and regional policy expects local authorities to maximise the use of recycled aggregates in building products. The County Council's preferred way forward for minerals includes:
- Always ensure the County landbank for minerals is above the national requirement
 - Require greater use of recycled aggregates in developments; and
 - To ensure minerals are extracted place no restriction on the size of mineral development approval

Waste hierarchy

5.4 The generation of waste per capita is relatively low in Norfolk. However, the County faces significant growth and that traditional methods of dealing with waste (ie landfill) are becoming increasingly costly and constrained. Recycling rates in Norfolk are good but there remains greater potential to (a) reduce the amount of waste being generated in the first place (ie. Packaging, construction techniques) and (b) increase the proportions of waste being composted and recycled. To address these issues the County Council is proposing 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 falls below a certain threshold

Transport

5.5 Minerals and waste generate significant levels of transport – distributing minerals, dealing with waste and visiting household recycling centres. The draft MWLDF is predicated on the basis of travel reduction and the proximity principle in both the minerals and waste sectors, in order to avoid unnecessary demand for travel. In order to reduce demand for travel the MWLDF proposes to:

- Allocate minerals and waste sites close to the markets they will primarily serve
- Give priority to sites that have the most potential to enable the use of rail and water-borne freight.
- Avoid minerals and waste developments where road safety and road width (less than 6.1m) are known issues and to give priority to sites that access directly onto the designated HGV route hierarchy.

Environment

5.6 Minerals and waste developments can have a significant impact on the environment, including habitat loss, archaeological damage, loss of agricultural land, landscape alteration, water and soil contamination and noise and air pollution. However, minerals are needed in the national interest and can provide opportunities for biodiversity through restoration and afteruse. The County Council is proposing that the balance between environmental protection and the need for mineral and waste development can be achieved in Norfolk as follows:

- Avoid SSSIs unless there is overriding public interest
- Avoid regional and local sites of nature conservation/geological value unless the benefits of development clearly outweigh the impact.
- Do not permit development that would lead to loss of Biodiversity Action Plan habitat or species
- Development will not be permitted in core river valleys (not defined)
- Development will not be permitted on Grade 1, 2 and 3a agricultural land
- Restoration of sites will give priority to biodiversity and landscape enhancement and the creation of ecological networks.

6. ANALYSIS

Minerals

- 6.1 The scale of growth in Breckland and the proposed distribution of development needs to be reflected in the MWLDF. The Thetford Growth Point represents both an opportunity and a challenge in respect of both minerals and waste. The scale of growth in the town will require significant aggregates and generate additional household and commercial waste. It is therefore appropriate that the MWLDF makes provision for aggregate sites in Thetford. Solutions could include the use of a railhead either in the town or nearby to deliver aggregates or a facility that can be accessed from the A11. Additionally, the sustainable growth agenda presents the opportunity to encourage the use of recycled aggregates in the town. Dereham and Attleborough are also earmarked for significant growth to 2021 which will require aggregates. Both towns are served by rail and adjoin the strategic road network and it would be appropriate to encourage mineral handling facilities close to these centres. On this basis Breckland Council should support the County Council's option of a more decentralised approach to mineral development.
- 6.2 In respect of Thetford the options for growth within environmental limits are already defined. The town is encircled by nature conservation sites of European importance leaving the options for urban extensions to the north and east. The capacity of these extensions is currently being determined by Masterplan work and infrastructure studies. Given the finite amount of developable land available, 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. This issue needs to be recognised in the development in the MWLDF.
- 6.3 The vernacular in Breckland is sustained by many local minerals including flint, chalk and carrstone, some of which are still extracted in Breckland (eg Newton quarry near Castle Acre). It is important that future supplies of these materials are recognised and protected in the Norfolk MWLDF.

Waste

- 6.4 Thetford will also need strategic waste infrastructure to deal with waste within the town. There is already a household recycling centre and weighbridge on Burrell Way Industrial Estate but further capacity and solutions should be investigated. Additionally there is a strong need to provide a household waste facility in the Dereham area for the existing community in and around the town and the future population growth. Again on this basis Breckland Council should support the County Council's option of a more decentralised approach to waste developments.
- 6.5 The options for the proposed waste hierarchy should be supported, 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.
- 6.6 The MWLDF needs 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 avoids direct conflict with local communities although the access to these sites requires careful consideration.

Additionally, the MWLDF should give greater support to the potential of suitably located agricultural buildings for waste and minerals purposes.

Environment

- 6.7 The strong emphasis on environmental protection is supported given the significant number of SSSIs and local wildlife sites in Breckland. The presence of a large number of International nature conservation sites in Breckland needs to be noted in the MWLDF and addressed through Appropriate Assessment. Norfolk County Council wishes to seek the protection of core river valleys (although these are not defined). A number of river valleys in Breckland have already been exploited for minerals development including the Wensum, Thet Wissey and Yare valleys. Breckland Council 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.
- 6.8 It is noted that the document does not address Nuclear waste. This is partly a national issue but nonetheless there have been previous policies in the Norfolk Waste Local Plan opposing the storage, treatment and disposal of nuclear waste in the County. The issue is of particular relevance given past statements in the mid-1990s from the then NIREX (now the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA)) that parts of Breckland merit investigation for nuclear waste storage. Breckland Council should require the drafting of the MWLDF to set out the County's position on the storage, treatment and disposal of nuclear waste and what appropriate measures should be adopted in the event that a national programme imposes a nuclear facility onto the County.

7. OPTIONS AVAILABLE

- 7.1 Respond to Norfolk County Council's consultation on the draft Minerals and Waste LDF Issues and Options consultation using the Officer comments in Section 6 of the Report subject to any additional comments from the Panel.
- 7.2 Do not respond to Norfolk County Council's consultation.

8. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 To enable Breckland Council's views as the Local Planning Authority to inform the preparation of further drafts of the Minerals and Waste Strategy for Norfolk.

RECOMMENDATION TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 1

- 8.2 Members views are requested and that subject to any amendments that the analysis at Section 6 of this Report form Breckland Council's response to the draft Norfolk Minerals and Waste Local Development Framework Issues and Options document.

This report has taken account of the need for compliance with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy and the requirements of Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998. This report raises no matters to which attention specifically needs to be drawn under the legislation.