

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Notes of a Meeting of the Local Development Framework Panel held at Knowle, Sidmouth on Thursday 21 January 2010

Present:

Councillors:

Graham Brown (Chairman)
Ray Franklin
David Key
Tony Reed

Officers:

Matt Dickins, Principal Planning Officer
Nigel Harrison, Economic Development Manager
Karime Hassan, Corporate Director
Hannah Jarvis, Assistant Democratic Services Officer
Peter Jeffs, Corporate Director
Kate Little, Head of Planning and Countryside Services
James McMurdo, New Growth Point - Planning and Development
Manager

Also Present:

Councillors:

Vivienne Ash
David Atkins
Peter Bowden
Bob Buxton
Geoff Chamberlain
Paul Diviani
Malcolm Florey
Douglas Hull
Graham Godbeer
Helen Parr
Philip Skinner
Tim Wood

Apologies from Panel Member:

Councillors:
Derek Button
Mike Green

Apologies from Non-Panel Members:

Councillors:
Jill Elson
Steve Hall
Ann Liverton

Fliss Morey, New Growth Point Projects Director

The meeting started at 10.01 am and finished at 12.55 pm

77 Notes of the meeting held on 9 December 2010

The notes of the last meeting of the Local Development Framework Panel held on 9 December 2009 were agreed as a true record.

78 Local Development Framework Report update

The Panel received an update on the Local Development Framework (LDF) report to be presented at the special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on Tuesday, 2 February 2010. At the meeting Members would be asked to consider the responses received following consultation on the LDF Issues and Options Report, the process of producing the LDF and the resources necessary to undertake the task.

The Chairman commented that this was a welcomed opportunity to present the work undertaken to date on the LDF to a wider audience and explain the challenges to be overcome in order to complete a 'sound' Core Strategy.

Corporate Director, Karime Hassan advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee had asked to look at the LDF on the basis of its progress against the Local Development Scheme programme, with a view to address any delays in the production.

It was recognised that although emphasis was on the processes for production there would be great public interest in the meeting, especially from developers, as this was the first time Members' thinking on the LDF would be in the public domain. This was a critical phase in the LDF process and therefore crucial that there was clear leadership and a carefully detailed communication strategy. The importance of Members attending the meeting, particularly those that had not yet attended an LDF meeting was stressed; Members required an understanding of the LDF process in order to engage with their Wards.

The Core Strategy was just one of Development Plan Documents (DPDs) which made up the LDF; DPDs were the policy making plans and over time the Council would be able to produce additional DPDs for East Devon, responding to issues as they arise. The Core Strategy set out the overarching development objectives for the district but did not include any great level of detail; text may be included that explained particular issues but there would be no detail of possible solutions.

Members discussed the reasoning behind details of the LDF not going into the public domain prior to the special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee. Corporate Director, Karime Hassan advised that the LDF Panel existed purely in an advisory capacity, undertaking the necessary testing work to provide a steer and opinion on matters that could feature in future planning documents to the Development Management Committee; the Panel did not have the authority to make decisions. It was not felt appropriate to disclose information to the public until 'sound' evidence had been gathered to establish for example whether a site was viable/deliverable. Formal consultation with towns and parishes would be undertaken. Consideration would be given to the style/technique used for the consultation process, along with how it would be resourced.

Members sought to drive planning, collectively with the public, to ensure the process achieved the best outcome for the communities in East Devon; it was crucial this was relayed to the public. Resources needed to be made available to allow consultation with all the towns and parishes in the district. Towns and parishes would require an understanding of the LDF process in order to provide constructive feedback. The Chairman advised that the reason for the delay to the LDF production was in part due to the need to test alternative solutions to meeting governments target for house building in the West End.

Corporate Director, Peter Jeffs reported that the Rural Manifesto, produced by the Rural Services Network (RSN), had spatial dimensions and looked at a range of rural issues encountered by Councils with a significant rural population.

Local Development Framework Report update continued...

RECOMMENDED: that the Communications Officer attend the special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee.

RESOLVED: that Corporate Director, Peter Jeffs prepare a short report on the RSN's Rural Manifesto for the next meeting of the LDF Panel.

79 Training following the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Diagnostic

The Principal Planning Officer reported that the Planning Advisory Service diagnostic report had identified areas for training and development. Five training courses had been arranged free of charge by PAS, two of which could involve LDF Panel Members, these were R1: Delivering the common vision and R4: Spatial planning. Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) members would also be invited to attend these two courses (as well as one other), creating an opportunity to engage and build a working relationship. The other three courses were concerned with the programme for delivering the LDF and community engagement.

Non-Panel Members voiced that they would like the opportunity to attend the training sessions if possible. The Principal Planning Officer advised that he would contact the organisers of the training courses and advise Members whether there was capacity for them to attend. With regard to Community organisations, who would also be invited to attend the training courses, the Principal Planning Officer would gain clarification on who to invite from the organisations. It was recognised that it would be extremely difficult to capture all the community organisations in the district. However members of the LSP, which represented a broad spectrum of community organisations, were invited to attend. The key was to ensure that the information was fed back to the organisations. It was felt that the greater the understanding the organisations/groups had of the LDF process the more informed and constructive the response to the consultation would be.

Members were asked to advise the Principal Planning Officer of any known community organisations/groups that could be engaged with.

80 Timetable for Core Strategy production

Members noted the proposed Core Strategy Timetable (as at January 2010), which had been included in the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee. The timetable was dependant on a number of issues including:

- staff resource availability;
- financial resource availability;
- the South West RSS;
- desirability of consulting in the summer holiday period;
- possible local government reorganisation;
- general election timing/outcomes.

The Principal Planning advised that the Local Development Scheme timetable required revision to reflect the latest timetable.

81 Consultation arrangements for the Core Strategy

Members heard that production of the Core Strategy, and all LDF plans, required ongoing consultation and engagement with the wider community and specific sector/interests. It was intended that the training received from the PAS would help the Planning Policy Team to

Consultation arrangements for the Core Strategy continued...

design the consultation exercises. There was a number of consultation activities proposed for next couple of months, such as inviting feedback from Government South Officer South West (GOSW), Devon County Council (DCC), Environment Agency, Natural England and other statutory bodies on the report to be presented to the special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee to show the Council's emerging thinking.

One day workshops were intended to be held in the six main East Devon towns to test and refine emerging policy options and proposals. With regard to the rural areas this was likely to be a postal exercise; however the option of holding consultation events with clusters of parishes was being explored. The Panel asked that sufficient notice be given for the consultation events.

Public consultation on the Preferred Options report was intended to be held over the summer holiday period, and into the autumn if required. Submission to government of the formal publication was timetabled for early 2011. Timing of targeted consultation of specific interest groups had not yet been identified; if required further thought would need to be given to how this would be undertaken.

The Devon Association of Parish Councils (DAPC) and National Association of Local Councils (NALC) were suggested as useful resources for clustering specific interest groups/parishes.

An event similar to the Annual Town and Parishes meeting was suggested to present a background on the LDF prior to consultation. However it was felt that towns and parishes should be consulted separately to avoid parish interests potentially being dominated by those of the towns. Corporate Director, Karime Hassan advised that he would be willing to attend parish meetings and explain the background of the LDF process. Member's knowledge of parishes was an important resource and should be used to feed information and engage on the subject of the LDF.

The Chairman commented that the parish consultation exercises provided an ideal opportunity to engage and improve the relationship between Parish and the District Councils.

82 Economic Development and Employment Issues

PPS4 publication update

Members heard that the three main key themes within the consultation paper PPS4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Development were:

- Flexibility - in respect of rural areas and accommodating economic development, even if the site was not accessible by public transport. However protection of the countryside needed to be taken into account;
- Town Centres - reduces the emphasis placed on the need for a development and increases the importance of the 'sequential test' the onus placed on identifying sites and location for retail development at/close to town centres;
- RSS – advised that in the future RSSs should set targets for jobs sought or required. This approach will lead on to LDF documents making land allocation and /or criteria based policy.

It was commented that employment land already identified following the Atkins report should not be taken forward without reasonable justification.

The Chairman encouraged Members who had not done so already, to read the PPS4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Development paper.

Economic Development and Employment Issues continued...

A Ward Member for Axminster spoke of a particular piece of land in Axminster, in ownership of the Post Office, which was felt, had potential for employment use. Corporate Director, Karime Hassan suggested that the Ward Member speak with the Principal Estates Surveyor about engaging with the Post Office.

The Head of Planning and Countryside Services drew Members' attention to a paragraph set out in the Employment Land Provision in East Devon paper relating to people working in their home town or home parish, therefore not commuting for work purposes. It was suggested that this could be a Core Strategy objective, with importance placed on the quality of the job offer. The Economic Development Manager advised that there was a need to be more sensitive to how/where people worked now and might in the future and therefore consideration of how we seek to accommodate workspace, for example by increasing home office space. It was recognised that there would always be people who wished to live in a village/small town and work in the larger towns or Exeter. Avoidance of zoning in towns and villages was felt to be important. It was suggested that modestly designed office blocks in villages should be considered if it improved sustainability.

Corporate Director, Karime Hassan commented that there was a need to look at the profile of the towns and larger villages in the district, if there was seen to be significant levels of out commuting which the Panel could look to rebalance. It was accepted that many businesses were attracted to sites at or near strategic road networks and that these often attracted higher quality/skilled jobs.

The main principles for the Core Strategy were:

- Support the aim of creating balanced communities;
- Address out commuting providing more employment land opportunities locally;
- Recognise the contribution non- B Use Class employment uses can make to job creation;
- Service industry can contribute significant numbers of jobs, particular issue for coastal communities where environmental constraints may limit opportunities for new employment sites;
- Recognise high quality jobs would continue to be attracted to West End/Exeter area;
- Allocate employment sites in a range of settlements, particularly where need was identified.

Local Development Framework Issues and Options Report consultation feedback

The Principal Planning Officer explained that the Core Strategy and other LDF documents required an evidence base and proven consultation process. Consultation on the Issues and Options Report had provided detailed feedback and it was important this was reflected in the DPDs produced. Much of the feedback received accorded with Members' thinking.

Atkins Study and Task and Finish Forum (TAFF) Overview Committee Report

Atkins had been appointed by the Council in 2006 to undertake an employment land review primarily in respect of B Use Class uses. The Atkins report (plus addition of a limited number of further sites shown in the Local Plan) identified availability of just under 90 hectares of land. Following concerns regarding the figure given in the Atkins report, a TAFF assessment was undertaken which reassessed land availability and concluded that there was a significant difference between the two assessments. Therefore Members considered that particular part of the Atkins report to be flawed.

Corporate Director, Karime Hassan advised that the Atkins report had relied heavily on past trends and as a result had been over conservative in the amount of employment land that would be required in future years. Focus needed to be placed on job density as well as land availability.

Economic Development and Employment Issues continued...

The Economic Development Manager advised that the Council should be concerned with the 5000 registered businesses in East Devon as they come out of the recession; providing lower grade employment land, at a cost which was sensitive to what they could afford.

The Atkins report was recognised as a useful guidance document, which formed part of the evidence base required.

Devon Employment Strategy

The Strategy, nearing publication, set out a broad agreement of priorities for the Devon, such as Skypark, Science Park and the Intermodal Freight Terminal; from a strategic point of view there was a balance of need and supply. At a lower level the Strategy sought to identify local employment priorities, this included balancing smaller settlements, creating managed work space facilities for Axminster, Honiton, Exmouth and Seaton.

In response to a question, Members were advised that local priorities for development might be assisted and addressed through work/priorities identified through the Single Conversation.

Employment and Land Supply Issues in the West End

The New Growth Point - Planning and Development Manager advised Members that there were alternatives which would allow work to commence on the Science Park without the commencement of house building, however this would be a more complicated route and Cranbrook consortium would need to agree to funding the infrastructure.

Corporate Director, Karime Hassan advised that there was currently 35 hectares of employment land in East Devon's West End unallocated. Members were asked to be mindful that if the Intermodal Freight did not come forward and was found to be unviable, there would potentially be an additional 40 hectares of employment land.

In response to a question, Members were advised that there was not a requirement to have a five year land supply for employment land as there had been for housing; however not having sufficient employment land available could make the Council vulnerable on appeal.

Members were asked to consider whether Greendale Barton and Hill Barton formed part of the West End or part of the rest of East Devon.

During discussion Members' comments included:

- The need to look at the lower grade employment land;
- Concern that main priorities were concentrated in the West End;
- New Growth Team needed to be aware that during the recession other employment sites outside of Devon will have reduced rental prices – this could make it difficult to let those envisaged for West End;
- Identify and address reasons for 26+ age group leaving the district to find work;
- Greendale Barton and Hill Barton were situated in and should be looked upon as rural sites – not strategic sites – they should meet the needs of local settlements;
- Greendale Barton and Hill Barton were not looking for the large investment required in the West End due to their different employment offer;
- Concern that concentration of employment in one area would detract from the local towns. Need to spread the job opportunities across the district;
- Expansion at Greendale Barton and Hill Barton would require improvements to Clyst St Mary roundabout. Careful planning would be required to ensure there was no impact on surrounding villages.

RESOLVED: that the Principal Planning Officer present a detailed report on employment land provision in East Devon at a future meeting.

Economic Development and Employment Issues continued...

Employment and Land Supply Issues for Towns

Members discussed the employment and land supply issues for towns, which included:

- Creating job opportunities in town centres to improve vibrancy;
- Looking at the interrelationship between town centres and employment sites – help maintain viability of town centres;
- Provide the services/facilities in the towns to increase the skills' base – whole package;
- Support for managed work facilities;
- Concern that rents were too high;
- Look at skill gaps and skill mapping rather than just creating jobs – key element of economic growth.

83 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Local Development Framework Panel was scheduled for Friday 29 January 2010, at 10.00am in the Council Chamber.