

Report to: **Executive**
Date: **22 November 2005**
Report of: **Executive Member for Environment and Transport**
Subject: **Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East : Submission Draft**
Ward: **All**

1 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 This report considers the formal response to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East : Submission Draft (RSS), prepared by the North East Assembly (NEA). The deadline for representations was 5 October and this report therefore seeks the endorsement of officer representations submitted before the consultation deadline.

2 Consultation

- 2.1 RSS will form part of the statutory development plan and its preparation has therefore involved various rounds of public consultation. Members last considered draft RSS in February as part of an extensive consultation exercise. At this stage in the preparation process, the Council needs to determine which RSS matters it wishes to formally object to, or support and what further changes it wishes to see made.

3 Background

- 3.1 In February 2005, members objected to draft RSS because of the population decline in Easington that was likely to continue as a result of the strategy and as a consequence, to the limited housing allocations available to the District. Since that time, important changes have been to the document and these are considered below. Comments on the strategy needed to be forwarded to the Examination in Public Panel Secretary by the end on the consultation period on 5 October. The next stages involve preparing for an Examination in Public (EIP), which will be held in March/April 2006 before an independent panel of inspectors. The EIP Panel will select matters for examination and participants to be invited on the basis of representations made to the RSS.

4 Position Statement and Option Appraisal

- 4.1 The draft strategy is of extreme importance to the Council. It sets out a strategy for the long term spatial development of the region to 2021, determining how much development should take place, where it should be located and how it should be phased over time. RSS will therefore provide the spatial policy context for the preparation of Easington's Local Development Framework (LDF), and in turn, the LDF must be able to demonstrate that it is in general conformity with RSS.
- 4.2 In February, the draft RSS was generally welcomed by the Council as being supportive of Easington in terms of regeneration, improved economic performance and housing renewal; addressing areas of social disadvantage and providing protection for the environment. The general principles and overall strategy of the current 'Submission Draft' document are the same as the earlier draft and therefore, these should continue to be supported. However, significant changes have since been made to Submission Draft in the light of comments received, more up-to-date forecasts and the evolving Northern Way initiative. These changes have a bearing on the Council's previous objections and representations and two in particular, are worthy of further comment.

- 4.3 Dwelling Provision : The Co. Durham authorities strongly objected to the housing provision in the Draft RSS because the county was the only sub-region expected to plan for population decline, clearly undermining the future regeneration of the District. RSS now plans for a stable population and the revised housing distribution is intended to 'enable appropriate regeneration potential in Co. Durham to be realised within the overall locational strategy'.
- 4.4 In response, it is recommended that the increased housing provision in Policy 30 is now supported as the minimum necessary to facilitate population stability in Co. Durham. The allocations to Co. Durham in the first period of draft RSS generally seek to maintain existing development rates but these are reduced in later periods of the plan. Whilst these later allocation raise concerns, it is recommended that they should be subject to rigorous assessment under the 'plan monitor manage' approach at the appropriate time. As a consequence, RSS should explicitly acknowledge the need for future flexibility in its approach to housing distribution to enable a phased release of sites which is more responsive to the dynamics of the housing market, regeneration and affordability issues in the light of more up to date information becomes available.
- 4.5 City Regions : This section of the strategy has been greatly expanded to reflect the development of the Northern Way initiative. It seeks to enable the accelerated growth of the conurbations whilst supporting investment and improvement in 'Regeneration Areas' like Easington; particularly towns like Seaham and Peterlee. Indeed, the Tyne & Wear City Region of which Easington is part, is identified as a 'Polycentric City Region' with many settlements contributing to the economy of the region and numerous inter-relationships. One of the three regeneration areas, the Durham Coalfield Communities Area, incorporates Easington where development of an appropriate scale is encouraged within the towns to provide a stimulus to the regeneration of the wider Durham Coalfield Communities Area.
- 4.6 In response, it is recommended that, for the purposes of clarity, Policy 5 be revised so that more emphasis should be given to the development and redevelopment of the regeneration areas whilst focusing development within urban areas, particularly within the regeneration towns and centres.
- 4.7 A full list of representations to the RSS Consultation Draft is appended to this report.

5 Implications

5.1 Policy Implications

Once finalised, RSS will form part of the statutory development plan and will provide the spatial policy context for Easington's Local Development Framework thereby guiding the future development of the District.

Legal Implications

It is not considered that there are any legal implications resulting from this report.

Financial Implications

It is not considered that there are any financial implications resulting from this report.

Risk Implications

A risk assessment has been carried out and all the necessary actions required to manage the identified risks either have been carried out or will be implemented. There are no outstanding risks.

Communication

Item no.

The Examination in Public Panel Secretary be informed that the Council's response to the RSS Submission Draft, forwarded before the end on the consultation period on 5 October, has been endorsed by the Council. The Council's position will also be communicated to Durham County Council and the other Durham districts.

6 Corporate Implications

6.1 Corporate Plan

The Regional Spatial Strategy will have a significant influence on the future development of the Corporate Plan and supporting strategies.

Equality and Diversity

It is not considered that there are any equality and diversity implications resulting from this report.

E-Government

It is not considered that there are any E-Government implications resulting from this report.

7 Recommendations

- 7.1 It is recommended that officer representations expressed in this report and the appendix be endorsed as the Councils formal response to the RSS Submission Draft.

8 Background Papers

- 8.1 Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East: Submission Draft published by the North East Assembly. June 2005.

Appendix

Regional Spatial Strategy : Submission Draft
Formal Response by the District of Easington

- Para 1.48 Support 'Development Option 4' as the basis of RSS because it recognises the role of the defined main towns of Peterlee & Seaham.
- Policy 5 Oppose point (b). Further clarity should be provided as to the role of regeneration areas, which reflects Policy 6 and para 2.65. Delete – 'within the towns in the regeneration areas'. Insert new point – 'Supporting development and redevelopment within the regeneration areas, focusing development within the urban areas, particularly the regeneration towns and centres'.
- Policy 6 Support the policy of polycentric development and housing market renewal in the policy and supporting text because of the recognition and support for the need to regenerate the Durham Coalfield Communities Area.
- Policy 11 Support improved connectivity and accessibility along the A19/Durham Coast Line to provide high quality transport connections to the main centres, particularly for disadvantaged communities.
- Policy 12 Support the development of new economic activity in towns serving the regeneration areas, as a stimulus for the regeneration of surrounding areas.
- Policy 20 Support the inclusion of 'South of Seaham' Easington as a reserve site for large scale inward and mobile investors to support the regeneration of the area.
- Policy 29 Support the development of strategies, plans & programmes to develop an integrated package of measures to address low demand & abandonment of houses in the Durham Coalfield Communities Area.
- Policy 30 Support the increased housing provision for Co. Durham and Easington, as the minimum necessary to facilitate population stability in Co. Durham.

Express concern that whilst the allocations to Co. Durham in the first period of draft RSS generally seek to maintain existing development rates, these are reduced in later periods of the plan. Allocations in these later phases should be subject to rigorous assessment under the 'plan monitor manage' approach, at the appropriate time. As a consequence, RSS should explicitly acknowledge the need for future flexibility in its approach to housing distribution to enable a phased release of sites which is more responsive to the dynamics of the housing market, regeneration and affordability issues, informed by the availability of more up to date information.