

Report to: Executive
Date: 16 December 2008
Report of: Executive Member for Regeneration
Subject Outcome of consultation on Easington Local Development Framework
Preferred Options for Core Strategy and Development Management Document
Ward: All

Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise of the response to publication of the Preferred Options for a Core Strategy and Development Management document of the Easington Local Development Framework (LDF), and to seek approval for the associated Appropriate Assessment.

Consultation

- 2.1 Consultation undertaken as part of plan production, is guided by a 'Statement of Community Involvement', previously approved by the Council. Consultation on the Preferred Options for a Core Strategy was undertaken for a statutory six week period, from 16th May 2008 until 27th June 2008.
- 2.2 It is a statutory requirement that the likely effects of projects and plans on sites designated under European legislation are assessed for their impact on the integrity of the sites, and any significant effects are identified. This assessment, called an Appropriate Assessment, is required to be published for consultation with the plan.

Background

- 3.1 In April 2008, the Executive approved publication of the Preferred Options for a Core Strategy as part of the preparation of the Easington LDF. This was the first formal stage of plan preparation, completed before work on the District LDF was ceased in view of the transition to a unitary council. Publication was considered important to establish a timely statement of Easington's future planning objectives as a legacy to be taken forward by the new planning authority. This was made explicit when representations were invited. It is important to note that, whilst the plan making powers are now transferred to the County Council, the work on the Easington LDF and associated projects needs to be completed to ensure a smooth transition to the new authority.
- 3.2 The Core Strategy sets out the key elements of a planning framework for the area for the next 15 years, with core policies to support deliver key strategies for regeneration, health, education, social inclusion and environmental protection.

4. Representations on the Core Strategy

- 4.1 The Government Office for the North East considered that the document had a strong vision appropriately based on the sustainable community strategy and a good strategic focus. Concerns were expressed, however, on the strength of the evidence base for employment and retailing, with advice that an Employment Land Review and a retail study need to be completed before plans can be found 'sound' in accordance with Planning Policy Statement 12. This advice has been accepted and the interim planning team are currently investigating gaps in the evidence base in preparation of a Durham LDF.
- 4.2 Natural England requested greater emphasis throughout the document on sustainable development and in particular environmental issues, to give greater recognition to and protection of the environmental assets of the area as part of a green infrastructure.

This matter is being addressed in work for the Growth Point and will be incorporated into the Durham LDF Core Strategy and Action Area Plans.

- 4.3 One NorthEast considered the plan in relation to the Regional Economic Strategy and endorse the five strategic objectives, noting that they anticipate a greater regional need for higher value premises with greater employment densities. The Agency also recommended further evidence of market demand to underpin employment policies. There is recognition of the priority in Easington to balance supply and demand for an appropriate mix of housing, and support for the renewable energy targets.
- 4.4 The Highways Agency advised of the potential future capacity limitations of the A19 and the need for early consultation on future development proposals. This has been noted in preparation of the Growth Point bid and will be addressed in the Durham LDF.
- 4.5 English Heritage generally support the plan, welcoming the protection of historic assets and the balance between development needs and environmental improvements. Support was also expressed for a focus of development on the main towns and failing housing areas to encourage the re-use of land and buildings.
- 4.6 Of the neighbouring authorities, Durham County Council welcomes and endorses the plan proposals which largely conform with other strategies; Sunderland City Council objects to the level of housing provision in the plan above RSS requirements and particularly in the Seaham area, due to possible impact on housing delivery in the city and exacerbation of out-migration. An objection to the proposal for the South of Seaham site was withdrawn when permission was granted for the film studio. Government guidelines now indicate that Regional housing provision need not be regarded as a ceiling and the Preferred Option housing provision is being carried forward in the Growth Point plans.
- 4.6 Non-statutory representations raised the following issues:
- support for improved retail provision in Peterlee;
 - support for housing renewal plans;
 - improvement to public transport;
 - objections and support for the focus of development on larger villages and constraint on smaller rural villages, generally based on land holdings;
 - support for the spatial strategy from utility providers;
 - support for recognition of the special qualities of the Heritage Coast;
 - support for a new rail halt;
 - objection to the high targets for housing, affordable housing and target for re-use of previously developed land without critical evidence base;
 - objection to the target for renewable energy without justifiable evidence;
 - objection to the lack of specific policy for the Green Wedge;
 - support for more housing clearance
- 4.7 The overarching strategy to focus development on the larger towns and villages was on the whole accepted by those parish councils, residents and stakeholders who regarded regeneration, housing renewal and the quality of the environment as main priorities for the plan period. In contrast, objections to the strategy were generally from land owners and developers objecting to constraint on new development on alternative sites.

Appropriate Assessment

- 4.8 The Appropriate Assessment report has been amended in the light of comments received from Natural England and is appended to this report. The Assessment maps the sites with European designation relevant to the plan area, captures the significant reasons for designation, and identifies the environmental conditions needed to support

the integrity of the sites. This is confirmed by Natural England as appropriate. This information is transferable and should be published to inform an Appropriate Assessment of a plan for Durham. Further advice, regarding more detailed investigation of specific direct and indirect effects of the policies needed to demonstrate impact on environmental integrity is noted but has not been pursued in view of Local Government Review and the plan not being progressed to the next stage.

Implications

5.1 Financial

There are no financial implications.

5.2 Legal

There are no legal implications

5.3 Policy

Policy implications are addressed in the report.

5.4 Local Government Review

The Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2008 made Durham County Council the local planning authority for Local Development Framework purposes upon enactment of the Regulations with effect from 28th November 2008. Whilst plan making in the District has ceased, this report formally draws work undertaken earlier this year to a conclusion for transfer to the new authority.

5.5 Risk

As there will be no further preparation of the document, there is no risk .

5.6 Communications

The Appropriate Assessment will be published on the Council's website.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Corporate Plan and priorities

The report addresses corporate priorities to secure economic wellbeing through the management of employment and housing land supply, the redevelopment of major sites and support for tourism potential; also the priority for decent homes through the housing provision; the priority for clean and tidy communities through the environmental protection and improvement, recycling and renewable energy; the priority for better transport through the management of infrastructure provision; and the priority for healthy communities through green space provision.

6.2 Equality and Diversity

Equality and diversity will be built in to development plan preparation process

6.3 E-govt

Plan preparation and consultation will be undertaken in accordance with the governments e-planning requirements

6.4 Procurement

There are no procurement issues

6.5 Service Plan

This report meets service plan objectives for the preparation and timely submission of plans

6.6 Performance Management and Scrutiny

The report meets planning performance targets for development plan preparation

6.7 Sustainability

Sustainability appraisal is a statutory requirement of plan preparation and will inform all of its policies and proposals

6.8 Well-being expenditure

There are no expenditure implications

6.9 Human resources

There are no Human resource implications

6.10 Crime and Disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications

6.11 Human Rights

There are no human rights implications

6.12 Social Inclusion

Plan preparation and consultation will be undertaken in accordance with social inclusion objectives

Recommendation

7. That the response to consultation on the Easington Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Development Management Preferred Options document is noted and that the revised Appropriate Assessment of the document is endorsed and recommended to the new unitary authority in preparation of a Local Development Framework for County Durham.

Background Papers/Documents referred to

Statement of Community Involvement
Planning Policy Statement 12, Local Development Frameworks
Regional Spatial Strategy