

# NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**CABINET – 14 JULY 2009**

Title of report	<b>CORE STRATEGY – UPDATE FROM CONSULTATION</b>
Key Decision	a) Financial No b) Community No
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Purpose of report	To outline further challenges in respect of a number of key issues in the emerging Core Strategy
Reason for Decision	To provide an direction of travel for further discussion with all members
Strategic aims	Sustainable Communities
Implications:	
Financial/Staff	Allowed for within existing budgets
Link to relevant CAT	Place Shaping Local Prosperity Cleaner Greener
Risk Management	A risk assessment of the project has been undertaken. As far as possible control measures have been put in place to minimise these risks, including monthly updates to the Corporate Leadership Team.
Equalities Impact Assessment	The Core Strategy will have to ensure that any policies have taken account of any diversity and equality issues. Therefore all new policies will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment as part of their preparation.
Human Rights	None discernible
Transformational Government	Not applicable

Comments of Head of Paid Service	The report is satisfactory
Comments of Section 151 Officer	The report is satisfactory
Comments of Monitoring Officer	The report is satisfactory
Consultees	None
Background papers	<p>'A Strategy For Growth and Change' – North West Leicestershire Local Development framework – Core Strategy Further Consultation. Copies can be viewed at <a href="#">Local Development Framework - North West Leicestershire District Council</a>. Copies also held in the Planning Policy Team in Room 100.</p> <p>Copies of all representations received and all background papers are held by the Planning Policy Team in Room 100. Copies of the background papers can be viewed at <a href="#">Development Planning - North West Leicestershire District Council</a></p> <p><a href="#">Strategic Housing land Availability Assessment</a></p>
Recommendations	<p><b>(I) THAT CABINET NOTE THE KEY CHALLENGES ON THE ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED IN THE REPORT AND;</b></p> <p><b>(II) ENDORSE FURTHER CONSULTATION ON THESE ISSUES WITH OTHER MEMBERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE AGREED CONSULTATION PROGRAMME</b></p>

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The 16 June meeting of Cabinet considered a report on the Core Strategy which summarised the current position and the way forward. The June report outlined that a further report would be brought to this meeting setting out some of the key issues for consideration by Cabinet.

## 2.0 WHAT ISSUES ARE CONSIDERED?

- 2.1 This report considers the following key issues:

- Green Wedge
- Strategic Sites;
- Development Strategy;
- Strategic Distribution and
- Provision for gypsies and travellers

- 2.2 The report sets out the nature of further challenges on the particular issues and attempts to set a context for further consultation with members and local communities.

### **3.0 HOW ARE THE ISSUES CONSIDERED?**

- 3.1 There are a number of factors which will need to be considered in determining the appropriate approach to take in the Core Strategy. These include not only the various responses to the consultation but also more technical evidence.
- 3.2 In addition, the Regional Plan was adopted in March 2009, towards the end of the consultation on the Core Strategy. Its various provisions are now, therefore, firmly established. Where any changes are relevant to the issues being considered they are highlighted.

### **4.0 FURTHER CHALLENGES**

- 4.1 Cabinet will be aware from the report in June 2009 that the Core Strategy process has been subject to significant public consultation and is also informed by a robust evidence base which, as outlined above, is added to constantly throughout the process.
- 4.2 The purpose of this report is to set the context for further discussion and consultation on the main issues raised through previous consultation so that more meaningful debate can take place in the lead up to a Cabinet meeting in October 2009.

### **5.0 GREEN WEDGE**

#### **What did the consultation put forward?**

- 5.1 The consultation suggested that the Green Wedge should be deleted. A background paper set out a range of Options (7 in total) for the future of the area covered by the Green Wedge. These included possible development on parts of the Green Wedge or alternative policies to keep the area undeveloped.

#### **What was the response to the consultation?**

- 5.2 A significant number of respondents have objected to the possibility of development on the Green Wedge, primarily on the grounds of the loss of separation between Coalville and Whitwick.

#### **What are the challenges moving forward?**

- 5.3 The potential deletion of the Green Wedge has, understandably, raised concerns amongst the local communities. However, deletion of the Green Wedge designation does not automatically mean that some or all of the area will be developed. It is this potential for development and the potential threat to the identity that appears to have generated most responses, rather than the deletion of the Green Wedge per se.
- 5.4 There are a variety of Options open to the Council for the future of the Green Wedge, including a policy which aims to maintain the separation between Coalville and Whitwick in its current form or allowing development on parts of the area.
- 5.5 Whether the Green Wedge should be identified for development will depend to a large extent upon what the Development Strategy is to be and how the issue of Strategic Sites should be addressed. It would be more appropriate, therefore, to consider the future of the Green Wedge in the context of these issues which follow

later on in this report. However whatever strategy is finally adopted, it is clear from the level of public response that one of the key challenges now facing the Council is how to reconcile a development strategy with the clear community support for not compromising the identity of individual settlements such as Whitwick and Thringstone. This is a matter which should be explored further through the consultation process with members.

## **6.0 STRATEGIC SITES**

### **What did the consultation put forward?**

- 6.1 It was suggested that the Core Strategy identify Strategic Sites and that these be defined as 100 or more dwellings for housing developments and over 1 hectare for employment sites.

### **What was the response to the consultation?**

- 6.2 There was general support for the definition suggested from the development industry, but the Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM) has advised that whilst Strategic Sites can be identified in a Core Strategy, it should only be those sites which are central to the achievement of the strategy. It has suggested that an alternative threshold would be 2,000 dwellings..

### **What are the challenges moving forward?**

- 6.3 The intention behind the Core Strategy is that it should deal with those matters which are genuinely 'strategic' and leave more detailed matters for consideration in subsequent documents. If GOEM's threshold was applied to the potential sites outlined in the consultation, only two sites would satisfy this criterion (South-east of Coalville and north of Stephenson Way (i.e. the Green Wedge area)).
- 6.4 Some discussions have taken place with GOEM to ascertain whether a lower threshold than their suggested figure might be appropriate. For example, if it could be demonstrated that a site of, say, 500 dwellings was central to the delivery of the strategy for specific settlements. However, GOEM have raised concerns about the potential implications of such an approach for the timetable for the Core Strategy. This is because any strategic site would need to be backed up by sufficient evidence to show it can be delivered and because it may lengthen the time taken at the Public Examination and hence conflict with the advice in PPS12 referred to above.
- 6.5 It is clear however from the consultation responses, that the threshold suggested in the consultation is too low. However, in order to ensure that the Core Strategy provides a strategic steer the Council could consider the inclusion of 'broad locations'. The definition and detail of a 'strategic site' or 'broad location' is a matter to be explored through the further consultation process.

## **7.0 DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

### **7.1 Housing numbers**

- 7.1.1 Since the original consultation, the Regional Plan has been published. The Regional Plan has altered the overall level of development required and the timescales in which they should be delivered. However in broad terms, once commitments are taken into account the Council will still be required to provide

sites sufficient to provide at least a further 9,500 new dwellings by 2026, the original consultation assumed a residual requirement of 9,600.

## **7.2 The growth Option to be pursued**

### **What did the consultation put forward?**

- 7.2.1 Four Options were put forward with varying amounts of development in Coalville and the Rural Towns.

### **What was the response to the consultation?**

- 7.2.2 A number of respondents on behalf of the development industry are of the view that the amount of development in Coalville (9800 dwellings) in Option 1 will not be capable of being delivered within the timescale. Other respondents, especially local communities, also expressed concerns about the scale of development for Coalville in Option 1, in terms of its impact upon existing services and facilities.
- 7.2.3 In addition, about 200 respondents plus a petition signed by 307 people suggested that the Council should consider a fifth Option with a 'fairer distribution' of development which preserves the Green Wedge between Coalville and Whitwick.

### **What are the challenges moving forward?**

- 7.2.4 In terms of the deliverability of the four Options in the consultation document, a key consideration is the findings from the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) which was completed in March 2009. This identifies sites which have potential for housing and when they could be developed. The SHLAA is part of the evidence base to inform plan making, but does not itself decide whether a site should be allocated.
- 7.2.5 From the SHLAA it is clear that Option 1 is not deliverable in Coalville during the plan period (i.e. to 2026), reflecting the concerns expressed in the consultation document. Similarly Option 2 is not realistically deliverable in Coalville (8000 dwellings) in the plan period.
- 7.2.6 As Options 1 and 2 are not deliverable, the key challenge moving forward will be to consider what the most appropriate strategy should be. Both Options 3 and 4 appear to be deliverable and retain a focus upon Coalville as required by the Regional Plan. However, if Coalville is not to take the level of development originally envisaged, then what would be the most appropriate alternative locations for the remaining development? A number of consultation responses have suggested that both Ashby de la Zouch and Castle Donington be identified as 'Principal Rural Towns'. However, there are potential issues about how much development might be appropriate in Ashby because of the possible impact on the River Mease Special Area of Conservation. This will be a key issue to explore further through the consultation process.

## **8.0 STRATEGIC DISTRIBUTION**

### **What did the consultation put forward?**

- 8.1 The consultation noted that the then emerging Regional Plan had identified a need for the provision of a number of sites across the region for Strategic Distribution with the Leicester and Leicestershire HMA being one possible area for such a use.

Three potential sites had been suggested to the Council which could be suitable for such a use. It was concluded that land west of Junction 24 of the M1 best met the criteria in the emerging Regional Plan.

#### **What was the response to the consultation?**

- 8.2 There was some support for dealing with this issue as part of the Core Strategy. However, a significant number of representations were received objecting to the potential sites, particularly that west of Junction 24 where over 450 objections were received.
- 8.3 A number of nearby local planning authorities commented that it is not a requirement for each of the potential areas referred to in the Regional Plan to make provision.

#### **What are the challenges moving forward?**

- 8.4 This issue is of more than just local significance. The Regional Plan identifies that sites should be brought forward through partnership working and sets out the criteria to be used to identify suitable sites. It does not identify how many sites are required or provide locational guidance below Housing Market Area (HMA) level.
- 8.5 The lack of any specific requirement in the Regional Plan means the Council does not have to identify any sites for Strategic Distribution as part of the Core Strategy if it so wishes. However, the geographical advantages offered by the district in terms of this type of use are such that it is likely that there will continue to be interest in developing distribution facilities in the area.
- 8.6 If the Core Strategy were to allocate a site, then the Council would need to be sure that any site put forward was the most appropriate site within the HMA. However, the Core Strategy is only concerned with North West Leicestershire and it cannot consider the suitability of sites elsewhere.
- 8.7 Whilst three potential sites have been identified within this district these have not been identified through any partnership working as required in the Regional Plan but rather in response to suggestions from landowners/developers.
- 8.8 There are therefore three Options for dealing with this matter and these should be explored through the further consultation process:
- Identify a specific site as part of the Core Strategy or;
  - Include a criteria based policy to provide guidance for the possible allocation of sites through the subsequent allocations Development Plan Document or to assist the planning application process or;
  - Have no policy whatsoever on this issue

### **9.0 PROVISION FOR GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS**

#### **What did the consultation put forward?**

- 9.1 Two Options were put forward to meet the identified need for gypsies and travellers – either as part of the strategic sites (the favoured approach) or as stand alone specific sites.

### **What was the response to the consultation?**

- 9.2 A significant number of people objected to the proposal to make provision for gypsies and travellers. There was some support for the favoured approach but most respondents did not support the favoured approach. A number of responses from the development industry raised concerns about the impact upon viability and deliverability of strategic sites. Representatives of the gypsy and traveller community who responded tended to favour the alternative Option of making provision via series of stand-alone sites.

### **What are the options moving forward?**

- 9.3 The need to make provision for gypsies and travellers is clearly established in both national and regional policies. The Regional Plan requirement for provision of pitches in the district has now been set at 32 permanent, 10 transit and 8 for showpeople. (compared to 43 permanent, 20 transit and 10 for showpeople in the earlier version and referred to in the consultation document) but it is now over the period 2007-12 rather than up to 2016.
- 9.4 In view of the considerations elsewhere in respect of Strategic Sites, it is likely that there will be limited opportunity to make provision as part of such sites.
- 9.5 A potential way forward would be for the Core Strategy to include a criteria-based policy to guide the future identification of appropriate sites. Provision as part of a strategic site or sites should not be ruled out but this should be a matter for further debate with members.