

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LDF WORKING GROUP MEETING

6th FEBRUARY 2007

CORE STRATEGY

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Councillor Mrs J Dyer
Responsible Head of Service	Dave Hammond, Head of Planning & Environment Services

1. SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the current position regarding the preparation of the Preferred Options Core Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Members note the contents of this report.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 A key part of the new Local Development Framework (LDF) planning system is the requirement on the Council to produce a Core Strategy.

3.2 The Core Strategy is a strategic level document that provides the framework for subsequent Development Plan Documents. It will contain a spatial vision, strategic objectives for the area, together with core policies and a monitoring and implementation framework.

3.3 The Issues and Options Report was published in June 2005, which was subject to public consultation. This work was however carried out prior to the production of Government Guidance on key areas and the production of the Regional Spatial Strategy. Subsequently, a draft Core Strategy was prepared which was appraised in terms of Sustainability by Hyder Consultants. Work on the document was temporarily suspended due to staffing difficulties as previously reported but has now recommenced.

3.4 There are a number of external factors which are influencing this work. An important influence is the production of Government guidance in the form of Planning Policy Statements which have been prolific in recent months. The Core Strategy must be in conformity with Government Guidance in order to meet the Tests of Soundness. Recent Planning Policy Statements include:

PPS3 Housing (29 November 2006)
PPS25 Development and Flood Risk (December 2006)
PPS1 Planning and Climate Change (January 2007)
(Consultation draft supplement)

- 3.5 A further influence is the production of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy. The Core Strategy must be in conformity with this document if it is to be successful. Housing figures were released in January which indicate options for the amount of housing provision required in the future in Bromsgrove, which will have varying locational implications. It may also transpire that Bromsgrove District will have to assist Redditch Borough Council to meet its housing targets.
- 3.6 Other Local Planning Authorities around the country are starting to receive decisions regarding their Core Strategies. This has not been a smooth process and several Midlands Local Planning Authorities have had their Core Strategies rejected. Reasons for the failure of these documents range from a lack of local distinctiveness in policies, a failure to be sufficiently flexible in relation to the Regional Spatial Strategy, to lack of conformity with Government Guidance and deficiencies in the evidence base. This has had serious implications for these Authorities as often it means they will have to start the process again from 'scratch' and that 2-3 years work has been wasted. If Bromsgrove's Core Strategy was rejected this would additionally mean that there would be an absence of up to date policies and, due to sequencing procedures, an inability to bring forward other Development Plan Documents.
- 3.7 However, other Authorities, such as Bromsgrove, are in a good position to learn from the mistakes of these Authorities and take on board best practice of those Core Strategy's which have been approved.
- 3.8 Initial work on the Core Strategy at Bromsgrove has revealed a number of areas where there are gaps in the evidence base due to requirements of Government Guidance. For example PPG17 Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation requires Local Authorities to undertake robust assessments of existing and future needs; carry out an audit of existing provision, noting its quality and quantity and set local standards. Furthermore, PPS25 requires Local Authorities to prepare a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for their area.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Government advice is currently awaited regarding the time lag between the Issues and Options stage and the Core Strategy stage, the implications of Government Guidance and the Regional Spatial Strategy. Should this advice be received before your meeting, Members will be verbally updated regarding the outcome.
- 4.2 Re-programming of the Local Development Scheme may be required to reflect new targets, pending the outcome of Government advice.
- 4.3 An examination of the ways to fill the gaps in the evidence base will be carried out. The outsourcing of such work via the commissioning of external consultants may be found necessary, carrying with it funding implications.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The Preferred Options Core Strategy must be prepared as soon as possible, not least in order to avoid a policy void, as the Bromsgrove District Local Plan was saved in 2004 for a period of three years. Work on the preparation of the Preferred Options Core Strategy is underway. The experience of other Local Authorities will be assimilated into this process, together with recent Government Guidance and the West Midlands Regional Strategy.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are potential financial implications, dependent on Government advice regarding the implications of the Regional Spatial Strategy and the updating of baseline evidence.

6.2 Funding has been secured for the Examination In Public process.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None

Contact Officer:

Name: Rosemary Williams
Email: r.williams@bromsgrove.gov.uk
Tel: 01527 881316

Name: Jayne Pickering
Head of Financial Services
E Mail: j.pickering@bromsgrove.gov.uk
Tel: 01527 88 1204