

# HEREFORDSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: CORE STRATEGY: DEVELOPING OPTIONS PAPER

**Report By: Forward Planning Manager**

## **Wards**

Countywide

## **Purpose**

1. To consider the contents of the Herefordshire Core Strategy Developing Options paper.

## **Financial Implications**

2. None.

## **Introduction**

3. The preparation of a Core Strategy is a mandatory element of the Local Development Framework (LDF). In Herefordshire it is the first development plan document being prepared as part of the Local Development Framework. The Core Strategy will include:
  - a long term vision for the County and its places, this will look to 2026;
  - objectives for an identified set of key issues;
  - a strategy to deliver the objectives; and
  - an indication of strategic sites or locations, infrastructure needs, funding and responsibilities.
4. The development of a Core Strategy is about the shaping of places rather than simply the grant of planning permission and it is essential to link the Core Strategy to the Community Strategy and to the Local Area Agreement. To ensure that these links are made early in the process of preparing the Core Strategy an LDF Task Group has been established. The Group, which consists of Herefordshire Council Cabinet Members covering the portfolio areas of environment, housing, transportation and economic development/regeneration and Herefordshire Partnership Board representatives for community, economy and environment, provides a forum for the broad consideration of the spatial development of the county, and helps to ensure consistency and coherence across the Council and Partnership.

## The Developing Options Paper

5. In September and October last year a public consultation was undertaken to help to identify the key issues for the Core Strategy. In order to progress the development of the document further all reasonable alternatives or “options” should be considered and these are set out in the Developing Options paper. The development of options is:
  - an important element in ensuring the soundness of the Core Strategy;
  - part of the requirement of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive; and
  - is helpful in undertaking stakeholder engagement.
6. The LDF Task Group has helped to develop the set of options in the paper. Meetings with officers from key departments across the Council have also informed the options and technical stakeholders from key external organisations have been consulted upon draft options. A seminar was held for Council members in February in order to provide an early sight of the developing strategic options and a series of meetings with local members has recently been held in Hereford, and each of the market towns to review the options and implications for places. Initial work has also been undertaken on a sustainability appraisal and habitats regulations assessment of the emerging options with the intention of publishing these reports alongside the Developing Options paper.
7. The document sets out the key issues as well as a vision and spatial objectives for Herefordshire in 2026. The objectives have been closely aligned with the outcomes of the Community Strategy. The document also acknowledges a number of “givens” in respect of the need to be in general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and consistent with national planning policy. The strategic options therefore assume that the County are likely to have to accommodate at least the levels of growth set out in the RSS Phase 2 revision. Hereford is acknowledged to be a place where significant levels of growth will be directed over the period up to 2026 and it is assumed that the market towns will remain as foci for new development.
8. The Paper suggests four strategic spatial options. **Option A** provides a focus upon the economy, placing emphasis on economic objectives being the driver for change in accommodating growth. It reflects the Economic Development Strategy for Herefordshire. It would focus housing and employment growth to Hereford, Leominster and the market towns and hinterland settlements in the south and east of the County (around Bromyard, Ross-on-Wye and Ledbury) where employment demand is greatest. This latter area is referred to in the Economic Development

Strategy as the 'eastern corridor'. This option also draws upon the potential for transport improvements to support economic growth in the towns and settlements based on the A49 corridor, including Hereford, Leominster and Ross on Wye, as referred to in the RSS.

9. **Option B** places emphasis on social objectives being the driver for change in the County in accommodating new growth. The option emphasises addressing the impacts of deprivation, including income and employment deprivation and in terms of access to services and facilities (including housing) across the County and particularly in rural areas. The focus for growth would be towards Hereford and Leominster but with a dispersal of development to other market towns and sustainable settlements.
10. **Option C** provides an approach based upon environmental objectives. The option reflects the work on priority habitats emerging from the Landscapes for Living Project (2007) undertaken by the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership as well as Strategic River Corridors from the RSS. It also reflects the emerging Herefordshire Water Cycle and Green Infrastructure Studies. The focus of development in this option would be towards Hereford and the market towns as well as to sustainable settlements and within other areas where an environmental focus could be demonstrated. A key priority of the option would be to use the opportunities presented through growth to invest in the provision, restoration and enhancement of environmental assets ensuring a robust and adaptable environmental framework across the County.
11. **Option D** places specific emphasis upon housing objectives and focuses upon developing a new or expanded settlement. This option promotes the distribution of growth to Hereford, the market towns and a new or expanded settlement in the County. Further work would need to be carried out to identify sustainable locations for such a settlement. It is acknowledged that this option would not be in conformity with the existing or emerging RSS, which generally directs larger scale growth to existing settlements. However, there is continuing uncertainty regarding the regional housing requirement and the option may become more realistic if the housing targets of RSS revision are raised significantly above those that are currently proposed, such an option should be considered at this time even if it is discounted at a later date.
12. The Paper also focuses upon a number of place shaping options. For Hereford this includes:
  - options regarding the future role of the City;
  - the strategic distribution of housing, including an indication of potential directions of growth;
  - the potential for economic diversification;
  - retail provision and the development of the City centre; and

- transportation infrastructure
13. The Core Strategy will not contain a full range of development control policies as currently set out in the UDP. National planning policy guidance in PPS12: Local Development Frameworks indicates that local planning authorities should avoid producing a compendium of use-related development control policies and that policies should not repeat national planning policy statements. In addition the RSS now forms part of the development plan and its policies need not be repeated within the Core Strategy. However, there will continue to be a need for a set of generic policies for key topic areas and the options paper provides an opportunity for these policy areas to be explored. The context for these generic policies will, in part, be determined by the preferred spatial option and place shaping proposals, but there are options presented in the document for the development of policies for topics such as affordable housing, renewable energy, waste, minerals, flooding, water use, design, employment, health and open space provision.
  14. Options are also included regarding potential roles for each of the market towns, indicating where strategic growth could be distributed while recognising the existence of constraints in each place. The options document also considers the retail function and employment provision within the market towns. In the rural areas, the paper includes options for rural housing and employment and community facilities and services.
  15. In order to continue to make progress towards the preparation of the Core Strategy it is proposed that the Developing Options paper be published as a consultation document in mid June for an eight-week period. During the consultation period there will be significant publicity and specific stakeholder and Parish Council events. In addition, the Forward Planning Team will take a “roadshow” around Hereford, the market towns and Ewyas Harold. A questionnaire will be produced to accompany the Developing Options paper.
  16. In producing the options paper the evidence emerging from a number of studies has been utilised. Developing a robust evidence base is an important element in achieving a sound Core Strategy. A list of the technical studies, which will form significant elements of the evidence base, is set out in Appendix 3 at the back of the options paper. Of particular significance is the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and a separate report to this meeting is being made regarding this work. It is intended that other elements of the evidence base completed to date will be published with the Core Strategy.

## RECOMMENDATION

**THAT the Committee recommend to the Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing) that the Herefordshire Core Strategy Developing Options Paper be considered for approval by Cabinet for public consultation.**