

HEREFORDSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: CORE STRATEGY: DEVELOPING OPTIONS PAPER

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: ENVIRONMENT AND STRATEGIC HOUSING

CABINET

29 MAY 2008

Wards Affected

County wide.

Purpose

To seek approval for the publication of the Herefordshire Core Strategy Developing Options paper for consultation purposes together with the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment reports.

Key Decision

This is a key decision because it is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in Herefordshire in an area comprising one or more wards. It was included on the Forward Plan

Recommendation

THAT the publication of Herefordshire Core Strategy Developing Options paper be approved for consultation purposes together with the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment reports.

Reasons

To ensure through the publication of the Developing Options paper that stakeholders and the public are fully engaged in the development of the Herefordshire Core Strategy.

Considerations

1. 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.
2. The development of a Core Strategy is about the shaping of places rather than simply the granting 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

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
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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.

3. 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;
 - is part of the requirement of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive; and
 - is helpful in undertaking stakeholder engagement.
4. 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. In addition, 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.
5. 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 is consistent with national planning policy. The strategic options therefore assume that the County is 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.
6. 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.
7. **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.

8. **Option C** provides an approach based upon environmental objectives. A key priority of this option would be to use the opportunities presented through growth in the County to invest in environmental upkeep and enhancement. 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 the Strategic River Corridors in 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.
9. **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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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.

13. 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 detailed questionnaire will be produced to accompany the Developing Options paper in order to help analyse representation.
14. Other key elements of preparing the Core Strategy include undertaking a Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment of the document. Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is a systematic and iterative appraisal process, incorporating the requirements of the European Union Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive. The purpose of the SA is to incorporate social, and economic effects as well as environmental effects through the SEA Directive of the strategies and policies in a local development document from the outset of the preparation process. SA reports will be produced at each key stage of developing the Core Strategy, and will play an important part in demonstrating that the Core Strategy is sound by ensuring that it reflects sustainable development objectives. The methodology for the SA process will demonstrate how Herefordshire Council has incorporated sustainable development in an integrated way into its Core Strategy. The first volume of the SA Report for the Core Strategy is attached. The report includes details of a series of SA workshops which discussed various elements of the Core Strategy options. The brief results of each are explained in the main report whilst the detail is contained in the appendices.
15. The purpose of the Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) is to assess the impacts of a land use plan in combination with the effects of other plans and projects against the conservation objectives of a European site and to ascertain whether it would adversely affect the integrity of that site. Where significant negative effects are identified, alternative options should be examined to avoid any potential damaging effects. There are four areas within Herefordshire that have SAC designation, these are the River Wye (River Wye SSSI and part River Lugg SSSI), Downton Gorge, the Wye Valley Woodlands and the River Clun (part of the River Clun SSSI). In addition there are 14 sites within 15km of the boundary of Herefordshire which have been screened in order to attempt to indicate whether the Core Strategy options are likely to have a significant effect upon them.
16. The first volume of the HRA incorporating the screening stage of the assessment is appended to this report. It aims to ensure that the Core Strategy complies with the requirements of the Habitats Directive by identifying whether the emerging Strategic Options in the Core Strategy require an appropriate assessment. In undertaking this assessment it was apparent that due to the high level nature of the Strategic Options and the incomplete nature of the emerging evidence base, assessment of the likely significant effects on the European Sites site integrity was difficult to ascertain at this early stage. In light of this the precautionary principle has been used and except for the SAC designation at Lyppard Grange Ponds in Worcester, the Strategic Options are considered to have the potential to have significant effects on all the sites. However, the Countryside Council for Wales has indicated that some of the screened European sites located in Wales are unlikely to be adversely affected by proposals in Herefordshire and may well be screened out as the HRA process proceeds.

17. 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 of Cabinet is being made regarding this work. Elements of the evidence base completed to date and which will be published with the Core Strategy are being assembled and will be approved by the Cabinet Member.

Financial implications

Cost of the consultation exercise will be met from growth point monies.

Risk Management

Preparation of the Core Strategy is a statutory requirement. The various risk factors to successfully completing the preparation of the document are:

- The availability of staff resource;
- Funding being available to support the timely and necessary development of the evidence base;
- The extent to which national and regional housing requirements are subject to change as the RSS review process continues;
- Linked to this, the RSS review proceeding to timetable;
- Anticipated changes to statutory regulations and PPS12, coupled with proposals expected to emerge in the forthcoming Planning Bill.

Alternative Options

There are no alternative options, preparation of the Core Strategy being a statutory requirement.

Consultees

Government Office for the West Midlands, Welsh Water, Natural England, Environment Agency, English Heritage

Local member briefing meetings

Planning Committee

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Core Strategy: Developing Options Paper

Appendix 2 – Core Strategy: Developing Options Paper – Sustainability Appraisal

Appendix 3 - Core Strategy: Developing Options Paper – Habitat Regulation Assessment Screening report

Background Papers

Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks