

Report to the Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: **LDF-009-2010/11**
Date of meeting: **4 October 2010**

Portfolio: **Leader**

Subject: **Local Development Framework Core Strategy - Key Principles**

Responsible Officer: **Amanda Wintle (01992 564543)**

Democratic Services Officer: **Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)**

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To agree that the Core Strategy should have an end date of 2031;**
- (2) To note the legal requirement to test a range of growth options, both for housing and employment purposes;**
- (3) To note the legal requirement that all reasonable spatial options are assessed as part of the preparation of the Core Strategy; and**
- (4) To note the potential timetable options for the Core Strategy Issues & Options consultation period, and determine which of these is most appropriate.**

Executive Summary:

All local planning authorities are required to prepare a Local Development Framework. This will eventually replace existing Local Plans, and will set the policies against which new development will be assessed. However, the Local Development Framework is intended to take this further, and become a key delivery mechanism for the aspirations of the community and other public sector organisations.

It is proposed that the plan period for the Core Strategy should be to 2031. The preparation of the Core Strategy must test a range of housing and employment growth rates, and subsequently a range of spatial distribution options, whilst ensuring full engagement with the local community and key stakeholders.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

It is important to establish at the outset the period over which the Core Strategy is expected to operate. This will ensure that the evidence is sought over the appropriate time period, and that one of the key parameters of the document is clear to the community and stakeholders.

Similarly, it is important to be clear in these early stages that the preparation of the Core Strategy must follow a very different process from that previously used to prepare Local Plans. There must be an iterative process, during which all reasonable options must be considered and all appropriate evidence must be used to make decisions on the most appropriate options to deliver the vision and objectives of the community and stakeholders.

Other Options for Action:

An alternative end date could be proposed, so that the Core Strategy looks beyond 2031. However, significant work has already been undertaken on evidence base technical studies to ensure synergy with the emerging (but now revoked) East of England Plan Review. Several key pieces of evidence would need to be reviewed and potentially extended (at additional cost) in order to achieve an alternative end date.

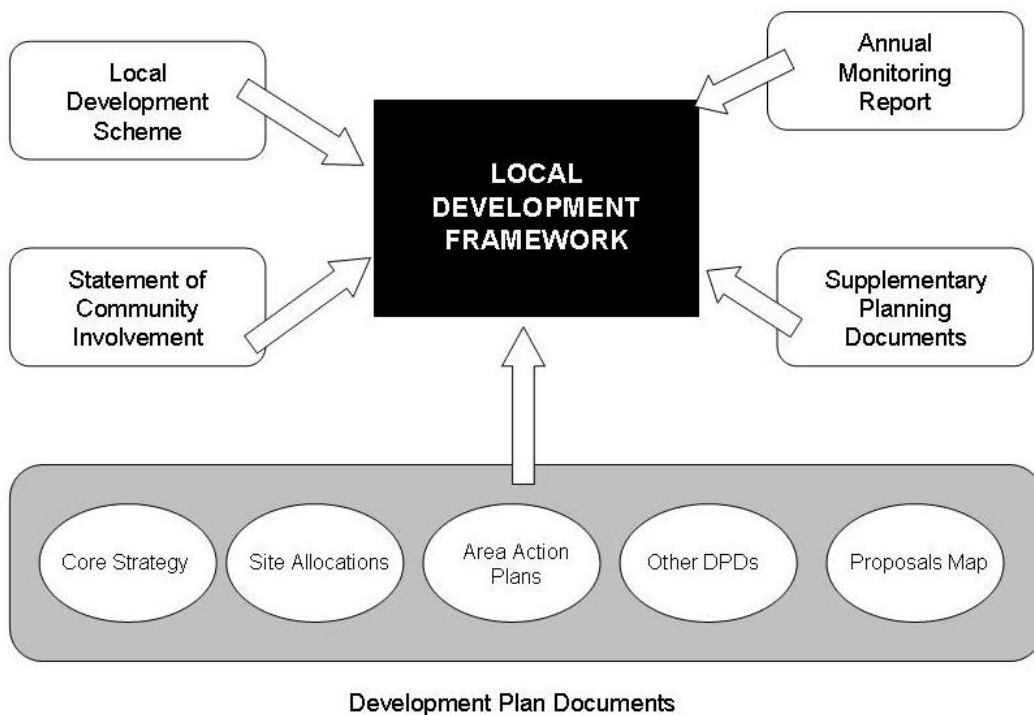
It is a legal requirement to fully test the reasonable options which may exist in preparing the Core Strategy. If this is not included as part of the development of the Core Strategy it is very unlikely that a sound document will be achieved.

Report:

Introduction

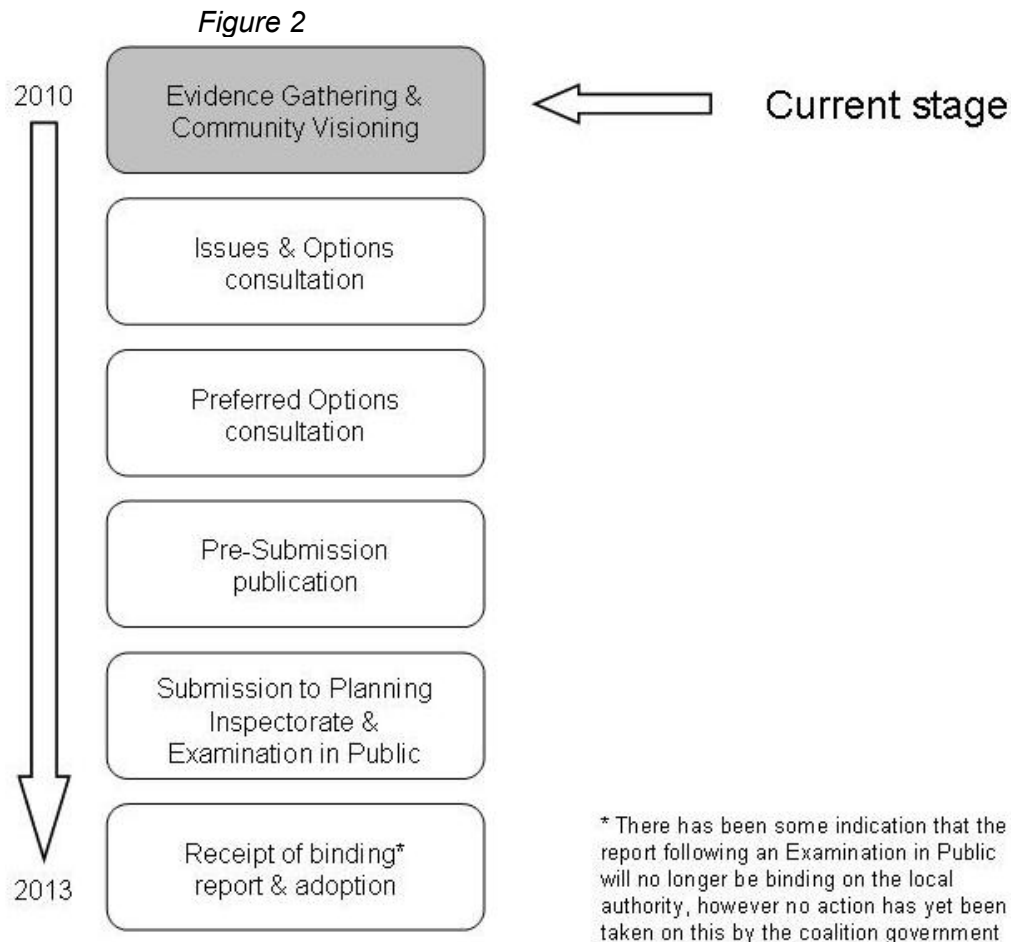
1. The requirement to prepare a Local Development Framework to replace existing Local Plans and Unitary Development Plans was introduced by the *Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004*. The diagram below identifies the key components of the Local Development Framework (LDF).

Figure 1



2. The central part of the LDF is the Core Strategy which will set the context for further Development Plan Documents and planning decisions over the plan period. This strategy must take fundamental decisions about the locations of new development; difficult decisions must not be left to lower tier documents.

3. There are several stages of preparation of the Core Strategy, and these are shown in *Figure 2* below.



4. The Core Strategy should be prepared in accordance with national planning policy. Regional Spatial Strategies have been revoked, and therefore no longer form part of the development plan. Further, the coalition government has made clear that the views of the local community must be a key driver in the preparation of the LDF. To this end, Forward Planning is developing a “*Communications Strategy*” which will describe how the community will be engaged in preparing the Issues & Options consultation document. A report and the draft “*Communications Strategy*” are also included in this agenda.

Plan Period

5. It had previously been proposed that the Core Strategy should plan for the period up to 2031, to ensure synergy with the East of England Plan (EEP). Despite the revocation of the EEP there is still a requirement (*Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing : para 53*) to make provision for at least 15 years of housing land supply from the date of adoption. Given the indicative timetable in Figure 2 above, it is anticipated that the Core Strategy will be adopted in 2013. The Core Strategy will therefore need to look forward to at least 2028 to meet the requirements of PPS3. Given the work already undertaken with a view to preparing the Core Strategy to an end date of 2031, officers believe it is appropriate to continue with this target.

6. The Local Strategic Partnership’s Sustainable Community Strategy will also have an end date of 2031, and mirroring this will help to ensure that the aspirations within this Strategy are fully incorporated into the Core Strategy.

Issues & Options Consultation Document

7. The Core Strategy will comprise a number of sections, which will include a vision; strategic objectives; growth figures for both housing and employment; identification of the most appropriate spatial distribution and key strategic growth sites; and key thematic policies to guide development decisions.

8. The vision and strategic objectives will be determined to reflect the key priorities of the local community and the Council. Community engagement as set out in the *Communications Strategy* will be fundamental to identifying these.

9. It is important to be clear from the outset that the Issues & Options consultation document is not a “draft plan” on which to invite comment. It is the first stage of an iterative process, in which the community must be fully engaged.

Growth Rates

10. Following the revocation of the EEP, it is for individual local authorities to determine the appropriate rates of growth to be delivered in their areas. In order to fulfil the requirements of Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment, it will be necessary to test a range of growth options for housing and employment.

11. Information that was being prepared or collected to underpin the review of the East of England Plan to 2031 remains valid for use in preparing LDFs. However, it will also be necessary to supplement this evidence to ensure that all reasonable options are tested.

12. In considering housing growth, the consultation draft of the review of the EEP 2011-2031 had included a growth target of 3,200 new dwellings for Epping Forest District. However, this had not been subject to significant public consultation as a regional document, nor had it taken into account the new “localism” agenda of the coalition government. It will therefore be necessary to consider a range of growth rates, which take into account a number of issues including the position of the district within the Green Belt, and the significant housing need in the district. As part of this process the Council will need to consider the key priorities to be met, and the balance that is likely to be required to deliver on a number of competing issues.

13. Essex Planning Officers Association is currently in the process of commissioning detailed population and household projections for each of the Essex authorities, and across Essex as a whole. Essex County Council is leading this project, and anticipates that initial outcomes will be available in January 2011. This information will be used to underpin the Issues & Options identified in the emerging Core Strategy.

14. Similarly, a range of employment growth rates will need to be considered, and again, the review of the EEP included a proposed growth target - 3,600 additional jobs in the district up to 2031. This draft provision, however, was flexible in that if local evidence suggested an alternative figure, this should be adopted in LDFs. An Employment Land Review is nearing completion and will give an indication of the floorspace capacity required by local businesses, and the industries that are likely to see decline and growth.

15. Once the key growth parameters are identified, the additional growth in infrastructure and community facilities that will be required will also need to be considered.

Spatial Distribution

16. The Core Strategy must identify the way in which new development will be distributed

throughout the district. However, this cannot be done in advance of identifying the level of growth that should be delivered. It is also required that, before a “preferred” distribution pattern is identified, all the **reasonable** options are considered. In a district such as Epping Forest, there are many alternative options, examples of which are given below:

- (a) planning for growth in each settlement in the District, on a pro-rata basis related to existing population;
- (b) plan for growth in line with the services and facilities that exist in each settlement, with those settlements with more services accommodating more growth;
- (c) promoting growth only within existing towns and large villages, seeking high density development where necessary to ensure delivery of sufficient growth;
- (d) promoting growth within existing urban areas, with an upper limit of density enforced to ensure existing character is not harmed, with additional small scale Green Belt land releases;
- (e) planning for several medium scale Green Belt land releases on the edges of existing settlements, with only minor infill development within existing urban areas; and
- (f) delivering all planned growth in one large extension to an existing settlement, the scale of which could ensure that all necessary infrastructure is also delivered.

17. Further, whilst the policy basis for the regeneration and growth of Harlow was abolished with the EEP, there is still an aspiration within Harlow to ensure that this growth takes place. The Council will need to consider this issue in light of the revocation of the EEP, and whether any future growth of Harlow *within Epping Forest District* may bring benefits to Epping Forest residents and businesses. If Members consider that it is acceptable to support some growth of this nature, an element of coordinated working will be required with Harlow District Council, at least.

18. There are many alternatives, and over the coming months the evidence will be considered, and only those that represent reasonable alternatives will be included within the Issues & Options document. The *Communications Strategy* also includes more details about how the communities within the district will be invited to be part of this process.

Sustainability Appraisal

19. There remains a legal requirement to conduct Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of all Development Plan Documents. SA is an iterative process which helps determine the effect of plans, programmes or policies on an area. This process is largely a measure of the sustainability (i.e. impacts in environmental, economic and social terms) of proposed policies against the position if the plan were not prepared.

20. A Scoping Report was prepared by Scott Wilson (consultants) to identify the matters against which the impacts of the proposed policies should be measured, and a public consultation period took place from May 2010. The responses are currently being considered by Scott Wilson, and they will undertake any further work that is required. In addition, following the revocation of the RSS, it may be necessary to identify further indicators in relation to the scale of growth to be accommodated within the district. This function would previously have been undertaken as part of the preparation of the RSS, with only matters of distribution required to be tested at a local level.

Proposed Timetable

21. There is a significant amount of work to be undertaken, both in terms of gathering technical evidence and engaging with the local community. The Forward Planning team consider it will be challenging, but achievable to publish an Issues & Options consultation document in June 2011. This will require the LDF Cabinet Committee to receive and consider a draft document at the meeting on 28 March 2011, with ratification by Cabinet on 5 June 2011. This timetable will be kept under review, as there are still uncertainties about the changes to the system that may be made by the coalition government.

22. There is still a requirement to publish a Local Development Scheme (LDS) setting out the detailed timetable for the production of the LDF over the next three years. Officers are currently considering all of the ramifications of the recent changes introduced by the government, and the subsequent resource implications, and will bring a revised LDS to a future meeting of this Cabinet Committee. This revised LDS will also be accompanied by a re-profiled budget statement.

Resource Implications:

The Core Strategy will be prepared primarily by the Forward Planning team, with input from other Directorates as necessary. DDF monies are available to fund the LDF up to 2011/12. The preparation of the Gypsy & Traveller DPD has had a significant impact, and subsequent changes to the way in which the LDF must be developed, mean that a detailed review of the use of this DDF will be required. This detailed review will be presented to a future meeting of the LDF Cabinet Committee, at the same time as an updated Local Development Scheme.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires each local planning authority to prepare a Local Development Framework.

The preparation of a LDF is one of the key mechanisms for ensuring the Council's priorities are delivered.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The Local Development Framework must ensure that sustainable development is delivered, and this accords with the general principles of the "Safer, Cleaner, Greener" agenda.

Consultation Undertaken:

No external consultation undertaken.

Background Papers:

Planning Policy Statement 12: *Local Spatial Planning*

Planning Policy Statement 3: *Housing*

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

The LDF is a statutory requirement, and is an expensive process. It is important that appropriate project management is put into place to ensure that milestones are met, and sound documents are achieved.

Detailed timetable and budgetary matters will be considered a future meeting of the LDF Cabinet Committee.

Equality and Diversity:

Preparation of the Local Development Framework as a whole will be subject to an initial Equality Impact Assessment in October 2010, with additional assessments carried out as necessary as the process moves forward.

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? N/A

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
N/A.

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?
N/A.