

## **Report to the Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Report reference: LDF-015-2010/11**  
**Date of meeting: 7 February 2011**

**Portfolio: Leader**

**Subject: Epping Forest Core Planning Strategy Sustainability Appraisal  
Scoping Report**

**Responsible Officer: Lewis McGann (01992 564493).**

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

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) To note the outcomes of the public consultation held between May and June 2010, and the changes that have been made by the consultants; and**
- (2) To agree the final Core Planning Strategy Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and add this to the evidence base.**

### **Executive Summary:**

In 2009, Scott Wilson was jointly commissioned by Epping Forest, Harlow and East Herts District Councils to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of each of the three Local Authority's Core Planning Strategy documents to help inform their preparation. These will form a central part of each Local Authority's Local Development Framework (LDF).

The Sustainability Appraisal involves identifying and evaluating the impacts of a plan on the economy, the community and the environment – the three dimensions of sustainable development – and then suggesting ways to avoid or reduce adverse impacts and maximise positive impacts.

In order to undertake the SA of the Core Planning Strategy, it is first necessary to establish the scope of the appraisal, i.e. the issues that should be included. The scope of the SA is established by setting a 'framework' to guide the appraisal. The initial draft of Epping Forest District Council's Scoping Report was completed in Spring 2010 and was subject to consultation with stakeholders and members of the public between 17 May and 9 July 2010. Comments received from the consultation process have now been taken on board and a revised Scoping Report has been produced. Members' approval of this document is now sought. Once approved, the document will then be used to assess policy options as part of the preparation of the Core Planning Strategy.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

The SA is a statutory requirement for Core Strategies under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Section 39(2) of the Act states that when preparing new or revised DPDs and SPDs, Local Planning Authorities must provide an accompanying Sustainability Appraisal. It should also be noted that the SA incorporates a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which is a closely related process required under EU legislation.

## **Other Options for Action:**

Not to allow the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report to be added to the evidence base.

## **Report:**

### Background

1. In January 2009, Scott Wilson was appointed by Epping Forest, Harlow and East Herts District Councils to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of each of the three Local Authority's Core Planning Strategy documents. A Sustainability Appraisal is a way of systematically identifying and evaluating the contribution that a plan is likely to make to the sustainable development of an area. The aim is to provide information – in the form of an initial Scoping Report, followed by a formal Sustainability Appraisal Report – that will be used to guide decision makers in achieving the most sustainable form of development for an area.

### Consultation Responses

2. Epping Forest District Council's (EFDCs) initial Scoping Report on its Core Planning Strategy was completed in Spring 2010 and was subject to consultation with stakeholders and members of the public between 17 May and 9 July 2010. In all, 155 statutory consultees and 8,057 non-statutory consultees throughout the District were contacted, from which a total of 114 replies were received by the Council. Responses were received from a variety of different statutory groups including Natural England, Environment Agency, English Heritage, Essex County Council, Go East, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and a selection of Local Parish Councils, Residents' Associations and interest groups.

3. All responses were passed to Scott Wilson for individual consideration, and a number of changes were made to the Scoping Report to reflect the evidence gathered through consultation. As the Core Planning Strategy will be required to set the strategic policy for the district, only those comments which Scott Wilson believed were of 'strategic importance' were reflected in the final version of the Scoping Report. As a result not all issues raised through the consultation have been reflected in the Scoping Report. Instead, these other issues have been 'scoped out' at this stage and remain relevant to what is a 'live' process. This essentially means that there is potential to revise the scope of the SA in the future should it become apparent that decisions taken through the LDF may result in significant impacts in terms of issues other than those currently highlighted. A summary of the changes made within the document and tabled in Annex I of the final SA Scoping Report document, can be viewed in Appendix 1 attached to this document. A list of the respondents duly considered, but which did not cause an amendment to the Scoping Report at this time is attached at Appendix 2. The consultants felt that these responses highlighted issues which had already been covered within the document or that they were too area specific when the onus of the document was to consider the wider strategic issues affecting the District.

4. Of those comments received, approximately a third of these came from local interest groups and members of the public who suggested that Theydon Bois should not be considered with the Central Line Settlements functional area. In response to this issue, Scott Wilson have now amended the document to highlight some of the key differences between Theydon Bois and the remainder of the Central Line Settlements functional area. These issues include the lower population density, and the fact that it is the least deprived Super Output Area (SOA) in the District in comparison to Loughton, which contains the most deprived SOA in the District. Theydon Bois also differs from the remainder of the Central Line Settlements functional area in that it contains virtually no employment in comparison to Loughton and Buckhurst Hill, which contain three of the six main centres in the District. By including these comments the Consultants have demonstrated the need to consider how issues can vary across a selected functional area.

5. Other significant issues raised from the consultation process were:

- the importance of the maintaining a network of urban green spaces, particularly around the Debden Estate and separating Buckhurst Hill from Loughton
- The possible air quality impacts to biodiversity
- The potential for biodiversity benefits through targeted habitat creation and enhancement
- The need to consider issues specific to rural communities
- The need to provide facilities and infrastructure to support active living and the need to support the key functions of local centres.

6. Text to highlight the importance of all these factors has been added to the final version of the Scoping Report by the consultants.

#### Next steps

7. The parameters of the future Appraisal have been set within the Scoping Report. However, this is an iterative process and will continue to evolve throughout the preparation of the Core Planning Strategy. Each stage of the Core Planning Strategy will be accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal, which will assess the impacts of the proposals and help to ensure that the most sustainable policy decisions are made.

#### **Resource Implications:**

From existing resources

#### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

The SA is a statutory requirement for Core Strategies under the Section 39(2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

#### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

The SA will ensure that the Council continues to protect, maintain and improve upon the high standards of Green Spaces within the District whilst tackling the issues which can lead to their degradation and render them unsafe to use. Beyond Green Spaces, the SA will seek to maintain and improve upon the quality of life in Urban areas by considering local built form and protecting and enhancing their openness.

#### **Consultation Undertaken:**

The initial Scoping Report on the Core Planning Strategy was subject to consultation between 17 May and 9 July 2010.

#### **Background Papers:**

*Epping Forest District Council Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report*, Scott Wilson (January 2010);

*PPS12: Local Spatial Planning*, Department for Communities and Local Government (2008)

*Sustainability Appraisal Of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (November 2005)

## Impact Assessments:

### Risk Management

If the Scoping Report fails to pick up all of the important potential strategic issues, this could lead to the Council producing an unsound Core Planning Strategy.

### Equality and Diversity:

This Sustainability Appraisal contains some matters relating to the Equality Impact Assessment. A full Equality Assessment will be carried out in respect of the Core Strategy in the future.

*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.