

Audit trail for Developing Options for the Core Strategy

Introduction

In considering the spatial vision for the Borough and the development of options for the Core Strategy the Council has had regard to the views of the community, the ambitions and objectives of the Council's Community Strategy, other policies and plans of the Council, such as the Local Transport Plan as well as European, National and Regional policy.

All options considered and the resulting policies in the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD) submission document have been subject to a sustainability appraisal. The sustainability appraisal has been undertaken having regard to the Council's approved Scoping Report. The Scoping Report identifies 13 spatial objectives to help create the vision for the Borough. The sustainability objectives were developed from the 13 spatial objectives. Both sets of objectives have been the subject of consultation.

Community Involvement

During September 2004 and July 2005 the authority undertook a number of surveys and held workshops to assess the community's views regarding the type and location of development in the Borough. The workshops undertaken as part of the land use vision survey were facilitated by Planning Aid. These surveys have helped guide the Council in the preparation of the Alternatives for the Draft Core Strategy (the Preferred Option). Comments received following the November 2005 consultation on the Alternatives for the Draft Core Strategy were used to further inform the production of the submission option.

The surveys and consultations undertaken are listed below:

- LPS2 – Results of New Homes Survey undertaken in July 2004
- LPS3 – Results of Developing a Land Use Vision survey undertaken in October 2004
- LPS4 – Results of Community Aspirations survey undertaken in October 2004.
- LPS8 – Results of Core Strategy Initial Options Survey undertaken in June and July 2005
- LPS9 - Results of the Alternatives for the Draft Core Strategy September – December 2005

The surveys can be viewed on the Council's website at www.wokingham.gov.uk/ldf-research

Other relevant research carried out included a review of settlement boundaries.

The Council also consulted during August –October 2006 on the Initial Options for the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD). Whilst this was a separate consultation to the Core Strategy consultations 2,500 comments (on a pre- printed letter) were received in regard to proposed Strategic Development Locations (SDLs) around the town of Wokingham. These SDLs are identified in the Core Strategy. As a result of the consultation responses the Council held a Wokingham Workshop in May 2007 to discuss the future of the town. The results of this consultation will be produced as LPS 10.

How the comments helped inform the Alternatives for the Draft Core Strategy

Issues and Options Stage

LPS3 - Results of Developing a Land Use Vision survey undertaken in October 2004

This consultation told the Council that consideration of the approach to the distribution of development should involve:

- Using land that is already developed, especially employment land for mixed use
- Protecting the character of the area
- Preventing the merging of settlements
- Improving the quality of the road network
- Developing indoor leisure, recreation, school or community uses in existing centres near similar buildings
- For Wokingham Town
 - Extending the shopping area and adding more shops
 - Tackling traffic congestion
 - Reducing through traffic

Workshops were used to drill down a little more and they provided the opportunity to examine conflicting responses. This was illustrated by a view that green gaps were important to protect because they preserved distinct settlements and were an essential part of the character of the area yet use of brown field land (in particular gardens) in settlements was difficult for people to accept. It became apparent that green field development if of sufficient scale could provide affordable housing and proper infrastructure, while brown field sites were often too small to achieve either:

The main points from the workshops regarding distribution were

- use existing sites (ones already identified in WDLP)
- opportunity at Arborfield Garrison but must improve transport links
- Need to target on settlements with better facilities but ensure smaller settlements remain viable
- well located development can safeguard countryside and retain quality of life, ethos and ambience of an area

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- we need to protect the environment but have a responsibility to provide for the community as a whole and the lifetime needs of the population,
- provide adequate infrastructure and secure appropriate north south links. The key issue is to get the critical mass to do this. We could use the community strategy to look closely at needs and aspirations of individual areas.

LPS4 - Results of Community Aspirations survey undertaken in October 2004.

The three main reasons why respondents said they lived in Wokingham District were: rural environment (45%), near job (33.8%) and good transport links (32%).

The summary below relates to views expressed at public meetings and three sections of a wide ranging survey by questionnaire, Economic Growth and Sustainability, Providing homes and Keeping the District Moving. Some issues were mentioned in more than one section but are listed below only once.

- Area becoming overcrowded
- Balance and quality of life needs to be addressed
- Need to improve infrastructure before building more houses not just roads but schools, shops, police and doctors' facilities
- Too many large executive homes being built, not enough starter homes
- Require homes for key workers, children of residents and to rent
- Traffic congestion
- Impact of the school run
- Poor public transport system, no public transport alternatives available
- Road safety issues including calming and speeding
- Need for more local shops in some parts of the district and concerns regarding continued viability of Wokingham and Woodley
- Removing traffic from Wokingham Town Centre

Initial Options (Regulation 25 stage)

The Initial Options for the Core Strategy were derived from the consultation responses from both LPS3 and LPS4 and the New Households Survey (LPS2), which amongst other things looked at where occupiers of homes built in the last 10 years travelled to access basic services. The views of over 1200 people were considered in drafting the Initial Options. In drawing up the options the Council undertook an extensive consultation exercise. This included an information booklet being sent to over 1400 people and organisations on the Council's LDF database. Presentations were made to Parish and Town Councils and staff distributed the booklets at public events, including summer fetes and also at railway stations and supermarkets. Advertisements were placed in local newspapers.

The Initial Options for the Core Strategy developed were:

- Continue Current Policy
- Community Renaissance
- Core District Hubs
- New Settlement
- Public Transport Services based.

The strengths and weakness of all options and potential outcomes of these options were set out. Geographically some of these options overlapped. For example all options, other than the new settlement option, indicated growth at Earley, Woodley and Wokingham.

LPS8 - Results of Core Strategy Initial Options Survey (Regulation 25) undertaken in June and July 2005

The results from the Initial Options Survey indicated that overall respondents were most in favour of the option that creates a single new settlement based on Arborfield Garrison, Grazeley, Spencers Wood or Shinfield.

They felt that this has the most potential for sustainability and directing development away from existing settlements. Respondents also suggest that a new settlement offers the most potential for a large receipt of planning gain which could be invested in the improvement of local services and infrastructure. In considering this response the Council also had regard to the new household survey, including issues of travel, undertaken in July 2004.

Community Renaissance was the second most favoured option. This option aimed at identifying where shortages in services and facilities exist and help create more viable centres.

The least popular option in both parts of Wokingham Town was 'District Hubs' which would concentrate development in Earley, Wokingham and Woodley and to a lesser extent in Twyford and Winnersh.

Consultation also showed that if development is proposed for a town or village the amount/size of development should be linked to the number of people living there. The preferred upper limit should be double the number of existing homes.

Question 8 in the Initial Issues and Options asked whether only one option from the five options should be used. The result of the consultation showed that the majority of residents were in favour of a combination of the options.

Sustainability Appraisal

A Sustainability Appraisal was undertaken both at the Initial Option Stage (Reg 25) and at the Preferred Option Stage (Reg 26). The full sustainability appraisals can be viewed at www.wokingham.gov.uk/ldf-research

The Sustainability Appraisal of the Initial Options appraised both the five options and the accompanying questions. The approach undertaken was independently validated by C4S consultants and found to be a sound approach in accordance with appropriate guidance.

The Sustainability Appraisal of the Alternatives of the Draft Core Strategy (the preferred option) appraised both the alternative policies for the Core Strategy and the potential policies for the Core Strategy (Annexes 1 and 2 of the Scoping Report). Consultees were the four statutory bodies with environmental responsibilities (English Nature, English Heritage, Environment Agency and the Countryside Agency), and internal consultees. In accordance with the Sustainability Appraisal Guidance 2005 and PPS12 other appropriate social and economic bodies were consulted.

With regard to the appraisal of the Alternatives for the Draft Core Strategy a letter was sent to individuals and organizations on the Council's Local Development Framework database. The comments received on the Alternatives for the Draft Core Strategy indicated no fundamental objections to the findings of the sustainability appraisal of the alternative or potential policies.

The sustainability appraisal carried out on the five options at regulation 25 stage was used, alongside comments from the community, to produce the policies proposed in the Alternatives of the Draft Core Strategy (preferred option Regulation 26) stage.

The potential policies in the Alternatives for the Draft Core Strategy were also analyzed for compatibility with government policy, regional policy and local plans and policies including the Community Strategy.

The project planning process for the Local Development Scheme was also subject to an internal audit to ensure a correct audit trail was maintained.

Other Sources for Developing the Submission Option

The Council recognises the importance of community involvement in helping to shape the future of the Borough. The points made in the consultation responses have been analysed and a judgement has been made having regard to how representative the points were, research and new information such as the Defence Training Review and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. Other issues such as deliverability, land supply, opportunities and constraints, including physical constraints such as floodplain and policy constraints such as green belt have also been considered.

To this end the Council has undertaken a number of studies, listed below, as well as inviting landowners and developers to put forward sites for consideration. Whilst the allocation of sites will be considered in the All Sites Allocations DPD, the submitted Core Strategy indicates that the majority of development will take place within strategic development locations (SDLs).

Studies

In developing the submission option of the Core Strategy the following studies have been undertaken:

- Review of Green Gaps and Wedges by Chris Blandford Associates (July 2006)
- Strategic Flood Assessment (SFRA) by Babtie with the involvement of the Environment Agency and council departments, including drainage and emergency planning (June 2007)
- Transport Study undertaken by Mouchel Parkman (August 2006)
- Employment Land Study undertaken by Tyms (October 2005)
- Retail Study undertaken by Donaldsons (July 2007)
- Open Space Audit undertaken by Atkins (June 2005)
- Landscape Character Study undertaken by Land Use Consultants (April 2004)
- Affordable Housing Viability Study (May 2008)
- Concept Statement and Concept Plan Work (June 2008)

Some of the studies have been initiated as a result of the consultation undertaken and have helped inform the production of the preferred option stage. Subsequent studies such as the Review of the Green Gaps and Wedges and the SFRA have helped inform the proposals carried forward into the submission document.

In addition specific studies have been requested from land promoters on individual sites, for example ecological studies and mineral surveys. Issues such as the Defence Training Review and changes in national policy have also been taken into account in drafting the submission version of the Core Strategy.

Alternatives of the Draft Core Strategy Preferred Option Stage (Regulation 26)

The Alternatives for the Draft Core Strategy was produced having regard to these two most favoured options arising from the Initial Options (Regulation 25) stage. That is the new settlement and community renaissance approach.

Paragraphs 2.6 to 2.45 of the Alternatives for the Draft Core Strategy indicated what this approach could mean for different areas of the district.

An extensive consultation exercise was undertaken to get the views of the local residents and other groups. A mail shot approach was used as well as informing those individuals and groups on the Council's LDF database.

Adjoining authorities and parish/town councils were also consulted. The documents were placed on local libraries and were available on the Council's web site. Newspaper advertisements were also placed in a number of local newspapers.

The preferred option stage proposed the majority of any future development in the Borough should take place within strategic development locations at Arborfield Garrison (new settlement), Shinfield/Spencers Wood (new settlement/community renaissance), North and South Wokingham (extensions of town/community renaissance) and the carrying forward of an extension to Winnersh. With regard to development outside of strategic development locations the Alternatives for the Core Strategy indicates areas where major, modest or limited development may be appropriate.

LPS9 - Results of Consultation on the Alternatives for the Draft Core Strategy (Regulation 26 stage) undertaken in November 2005

281 consultation responses were received on the consultation. Comments received indicated the following:

- Development in areas with good access to public transport, infrastructure and services were favoured in Strategic Development Locations
- There were objections to the SDLs chosen North and South Wokingham, Shinfield/Spencers Wood/Three Mile Cross and Arborfield Garrison
- SDLs were seen to also accord with Government Planning Policy but they were also seen as affecting character adversely harming biodiversity and straining infrastructure despite bringing planning gain for facilities
- There was recognition that brownfield land would not be sufficient to meet requirements based on past availability
- Importance of providing infrastructure and protecting countryside and green gaps was re stated - some thought designating SDLs to be incompatible with this
- There was objection to relief roads north and south of Wokingham

South Wokingham

- This would be sustainable option and capable of boosting town regeneration
- Some Wokingham residents rejected the idea of an SDL
- New roads would bring potential advantages along London Road and in the town centre but potential disadvantages in Ludgrove and Luckley area and delay the scheme and affect quality of life

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- Delivery affected by
 - Costs associated with crossing the railway line
 - need for mitigation for impact on Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area for birds
- Development would erode the green gap

North Wokingham

- Sustainable option close to public transport, shops and public houses and town centre and capable of reducing town centre congestion
- Does not suffer the constraints of coalescence and flooding applicable elsewhere in District
- Little changed since rejected for last plan. Development would still affect landscape and impact on the wildlife corridor of the Emmbrook
- Eastern part affected by rejection of a planning application at Plough Lane due to lack of mitigation for SPA birds
- Larger proposal can mitigate for birds

Town Centre

- Lack of clarity about what improvement of centre will be
- Uncertainty as to whether additional retail development required or viable (capable of being sustained) in light of the proposed expansion of shopping in Bracknell
- Question as to whether new development is required to support retail use
- Seek promotion of alternative methods of transport and traffic diversion from town without housing development

LPS10 - Site Allocations DPD Initial Issues and Options September and October 2006

Of the 3,040 responses 2,600 were in the form of a standard letter produced by six residents associations in Wokingham town who were opposed to sites in North Wokingham and South Wokingham SDLs. No new issues were raised by this group although there was some support for Arborfield Garrison and development around Junction 11 of M4. In view of the level of interest a facilitated stakeholder workshop was held in May 2007 on the future of Wokingham. A report of this workshop was made available.

Other suggestions from the Initial Options for the Sites Allocation DPD were:

- that SDLs would reduce pressure on infill sites
- the South Wokingham SDL would impact on the Pinewood area of Crowthorne
- provision of public open space and land for SPA mitigation would be provided to secure the South Wokingham gap

Submission Version of the Core Strategy (Regulation 28 stage)

The information and evidence from these consultations and studies has helped in guiding the development of the preferred submission option for the Core Strategy as the most appropriate to meet the spatial vision for the Borough.

The views received lead to some extent in different directions, but what is clear is that the wide range of people who chose to express their views wanted to ensure protection of the countryside and character of the area. Any development should be provided at a scale that is capable of providing improved infrastructure and services. People objected to options which meant the most change in the areas where they live.

The option for a new settlement at the Initial Options Stage and draft Submissions Stage conflicted with Government Policy at the time as set out in PPG3. PPG3 allowed consideration of new settlements only as a last resort. PPS3 has replaced PPG3. It removes a sequential approach to provision of housing and allows for a wider range of sites to be considered provided they are sustainable. However they must also be available, suitable and financially viable.

The approach taken in the submission version of the Core Strategy is in line both with PPS3 and with the two most favoured options arising from the Initial Options (Regulation 25) stage.

The Core Strategy indicates a new settlement approach at Arborfield and a new settlement/community renaissance approach at South of the M4 Strategic Development Location. A community renaissance /town extension approach is indicated in the Wokingham SDLs. This approach would help in regenerating the town centre and would allow for a sustainable approach to development.

The timing of development in these areas is also considered in the submission version of the Core Strategy. With regard to issues of protecting the countryside and gap these are considered in policies within both the preferred option version and the submission version of the Core Strategy (Policy CP13).

The Council has commissioned David Lock Associates to undertake an independent and tested approach to define the boundaries of the Strategic Development Locations (SDLs). The boundaries of the Strategic Development Locations and Gaps will be defined in the submission version of the Core Strategy. Development Limits outside of the SDLs will be applied in the Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD).