

Committee: Full Council

Date: 15 February 2007

Title: East of England Plan Proposed Changes

Author: Roger Harborough Planning Policy and
Conservation Manager

Agenda Item

18

Item for
decision

Summary

This reports recommends how the Council responds to the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy, the East of England Plan.

Recommendations

That the Council:

- 1 supports the Overall Spatial Vision;
- 2 supports the stronger policies to promote greater efficiency in the use of energy and water and the development of green infrastructure;
- 3 supports the new policies on the regional transport strategy including objectives of managing travel behaviour and demand for transport with aim of reducing the rate of road traffic growth and ensuring the transport sector makes an appropriate contribution to the required reduction in greenhouse gas emissions;
- 4 supports the proposed revised objectives indicating six ways in which to reduce the region's impact on, and exposure to, the effects of climate change, but seeks that a further point "Taking into account external climate change costs in major increases in the region's airport capacity" should be added;
- 5 objects to the assumption in the Proposed Changes that by 2021 Stansted will have a second runway on the grounds of inconsistency with the Overall Spatial Vision and objectives of the Plan. The Plan should indicate how the spatial strategy will respond if the airport expansion proposals do not proceed. Phasing policies linking housing, employment and infrastructure are essential;
- 6 objects to Policy T15 Transport Investment Priorities failing to articulate any real priorities, and containing no specific measures for the London to Stansted corridor, including Harlow and access to Stansted Airport.
- 7 objects to the regional and local dwelling targets being expressed as minima, and the requirement for the first round of Local

Development Documents to make provision for development beyond 2021;

- 8 objects to the Government's statement that forms part of its justification for retaining the definition of the Cambridge Sub Region – it is not acknowledged that there would be any acceptable development options that would be constrained from inclusion in the proposed review of the RSS by excluding the Uttlesford part of the Cambridge to Saffron Walden corridor from the Sub Region.

Background Papers

The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report:

- East of England Plan Examination in Public Report of the Panel June 2006
- East of England Plan Secretary of State's Proposed Changes December 2006
- Report to the East of England Assembly 2 February 2007 and the Resolution agreed by the Assembly

Impact

Communication/Consultation	GO East instigated consultation on 19 December on the Proposed Changes involving an extensive communication programme
Community Safety	Addressed in the RSS
Equalities	Addressed in the RSS
Finance	Infrastructure funding is addressed in the report
Human Rights	Addressed in the RSS
Legal implications	Consultation on Proposed Changes is part of a statutory process for the preparation of regional spatial strategies
Sustainability	Key areas where there is a potential for likely significant effects are: pressure on

	water resources and services; changes to landscape character; protection of biodiversity; and changes to the quality of the historic environment; waste and facilities for the treatment and disposal of waste; and resource efficiency and resource consumption, especially energy consumption and carbon emissions. Further explanation is given in the Sustainability Appraisal published by GO East.
Ward-specific impacts	No specific impacts can be identified in Uttlesford at this stage. These will be considered through the Local Development Framework.
Workforce/Workplace	Engaging in the preparation of the RSS is included in the service plan

Situation

- 1 Proposed Changes have been published by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for formal comment. Responses will be taken into account by the Secretary of State in finalising the Plan, which is expected to take place in Spring 2007. The changes relate to the Report of the Panel that carried out the Examination in Public of the Draft Plan. Where the Secretary of State has not accepted the Panel recommendation, the reason is stated in the consultation document.

Sustainable development

- 2 The Secretary of State has endorsed the Panel recommendation that changes should be made to the Draft Plan so that it makes a stronger contribution to achieving sustainable development. The Proposed Changes set out an overall vision: “By 2021 the East of England will be realising its economic potential and providing a high quality of life for its people, including by meeting their housing needs in sustainable and inclusive communities. At the same time it will reduce its impact on climate change and the environment, including through savings in energy and water use and by strengthening its stock of environmental assets”. The Proposed Changes also include an overall policy on achieving sustainable development, setting out the criteria that determine a “sustainable community”. Reflecting the

recently announced draft Planning Policy Statement on climate change, the Plan contains proposals for carbon performance trajectories for new development and local authorities will be asked to encourage a proportion of energy supply for new homes to come from renewable or low carbon sources after 2016.

Employment

- 3 The Secretary of State proposes an indicative job growth target for the whole region of 452,000. This figure is up from the Panel recommendation of 440,000 and the draft Plan's 421,000. An indicative target is proposed for "Central and North Essex" comprising Harlow/ Uttlesford/ Chelmsford/ Braintree/ Maldon of 42,000. This is calculated from a figure of 21,000 representing the enhanced growth forecasts for 2021, plus 11,000 "to reflect extra job growth at Stansted Airport (direct jobs) up to 2021 in consequence of moving beyond full use of the existing runway once a second is built". A further 10,000 jobs is added "to reflect Harlow's regeneration needs and its potential to attract some indirect Stansted related job growth." A target is proposed for London Arc in Essex (Brentwood and Epping Forest) of 14,000, this being the sum of the enhanced growth forecasts for those two districts.

Housing

- 4 An increase of a net additional 508,000 homes for the whole region by 2021 is proposed. This is up from the Panel's recommended figure of 505,500 (itself an increase of 27,500 homes on the Draft Plan's 478,000). This further increase represents net additional growth now proposed in the Harlow area (Harlow North). The Secretary of State has also accepted all other increases in District allocations proposed by the Panel. All housing figures are to be treated as floors and not ceilings and local planning authorities should seek to exceed their targets if more can be delivered through brownfield capacity and, where appropriate, increased densities. There are also strong hints that further increases will be needed in the early review of the RSS, rolling forward to 2031. No change is proposed in Uttlesford figures, which remain at a net increase of 8,000 from 2001 to 2021, but the revised interpretation of the target applies to all districts. The Panel's recommendation for an aspirational 35% regional target for affordable housing has been endorsed in the Proposed Changes. Targets for affordable housing, and social rented and intermediate housing where appropriate on suitable new developments are proposed to be set in Local Development Documents.

Transport

- 5 The Secretary of State has accepted the thrust of Panel's recommendations on the Regional Transport Strategy but the aim of an absolute reduction in traffic in Plan period is regarded as potentially unrealistic. Priority areas are identified for further study work to determine the measures needed to tackle congestion and support growth. These cover large parts of the region including several corridors radiating out from London. No East-West corridors are identified for such studies. Demand management policies that would follow any future agreed national policy are included, but the Panel's conclusions regarding road pricing producing more funds for transport investment are rejected. Overall there is very little specificity regarding the nature of measures that may be promoted over and above those already approved through other processes.
- 6 Whilst the draft Plan stated EERA's opposition to a second runway at Stansted Airport, there would be no policy in the regional spatial strategy on airport capacity in the East of England under the Proposed Changes. The Plan would state: "For airports the national policy framework is set out in the Air Transport White Paper. The RSS does not have a role in determining the rate of air traffic growth or runway provision". RSS policy on airports would only cover management and enhancement of access to support development, and "to enable airports to contribute to national and regional objectives in relation to economic growth and regeneration".

Water

- 7 The Proposed Changes develop the Panel's recommendations on water by including a comprehensive set of policies on water supply and waste water treatment infrastructure, water resource development, and integrated water cycle studies. Development provided for in the Plan should be matched by improvements in water efficiency. Appropriate additional infrastructure needed should be identified. Local Development documents should plan to site new development so as to maximise the potential of existing infrastructure and minimise the need for new plant and networks.

Cambridge Sub Region

- 8 The Government proposes to retain the definition of the Cambridge sub-region as in the Draft Plan, including the market towns of Royston, Saffron Walden, Haverhill and Newmarket. The Panel recommended the omission of these towns beyond Cambridgeshire from the definition. The Government's reasons include the comment: "To exclude some of the ring of market towns and intervening transport corridors could imply an inappropriately constrained context for the consideration of long term development and transport options for the wider Cambridge area within the review of the RSS."

Comment

- 9 The Overall Spatial Vision reflects those concerns that have been identified in our own local community vision work. It is particularly helpful that reducing the region's impact on climate change and the environment and the need for savings in energy and water use is given such high prominence and importance in the Plan.
- 10 The Proposed revised objectives indicate six ways in which to reduce the region's impact on, and exposure to, the effects of climate change. These do not include any reference to increases in the region's airport capacity as proposed in the Air Transport White Paper. At the very least, "Taking into account external climate change costs in major increases in the region's airport capacity" should be added.
- 11 The assumption in the Proposed Changes that by 2021 Stansted will have a second runway is inconsistent with the Overall Spatial Vision and objectives of the Plan. BAA's proposals for a second runway need to be subject to detail critical examination through a planning application process, which will assess its environmental impact and economic impacts and transport implications. The Plan should indicate how the spatial strategy will respond if the airport expansion proposals do not proceed. Direct job growth at Stansted is one of the few specific elements in the employment growth targets in the Proposed Changes. It is suggested that phasing policies linking housing, employment and infrastructure are essential.
- 12 Officers share the Regional Assembly's extreme disappointment over the lack of guarantees in the Proposed Changes on funding for the increased levels of investment to support delivery of the Plan. Policy T15 Transport Investment Priorities will need to be more clearly articulated in the Final Plan than the list of "areas identified to come under increasing transport pressure as a result of underlying traffic growth and the development strategy of the RSS where further work should be focussed to identify the interventions needed". The Council has a particular interest in this issue as one of the areas is obviously the London to Stansted corridor, including Harlow and access to Stansted Airport.
- 13 In view of the above, officers also share the Regional Assembly's objections to the regional and local dwelling targets being expressed as minima, and the requirement for the first round of Local Development Documents to make provision for development beyond 2021. The annual rate of housing delivery required (400 homes) is already challenging and substantially exceeds recent housing market performance despite an adequate supply of available housing land. It should be appreciated that the increases would be in the context of step change in development in the Key Centres for Development and Change, which include Cambridge, Chelmsford and Harlow, and the construction programme for the 2012 Games. Shortage of construction skills could become a constraint on the delivery of existing housing targets.

- 14 Finally, the Council should object to the Government’s statement that forms part of its justification for retaining the definition of the Cambridge Sub Region – it is not acknowledged that there would be any acceptable development options that would be constrained from inclusion in the proposed review of the RSS by excluding the Uttlesford part of the Cambridge to Saffron Walden corridor from the Sub Region.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions