

**Committee:** Scrutiny

**Agenda Item**

**Date:** 8 May 2012

**5**

**Title:** Distribution Strategy for Local Plan

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr S Barker

Key decision: **Yes**

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## Summary

1. The current strategy was initially set out in the *Preferred Options Consultation* in November 2007 which proposed 3,000 homes at Elsenham as a linked new settlement and 1,000 homes in towns and villages.
2. This consultation was backed up by the *Further Consultation on Preferred Options* in February 2010. This allowed consultation on issues which had been insufficiently dealt with in 2007 – namely future growth of Stansted Airport; the distribution of the 1,000 homes in the towns and villages; and the background evidence base to compare the impact of Option 4 with other options. The latter was set out in a *Comparative Sustainability Assessment (2010)*.
3. The latest consultation on the *Role of Settlements and Site Allocations* in January 2012 considered the existing hierarchy of settlements based on the level of facilities in each market town and village. The consultation suggested that a review of the towns and villages indicated that the towns as the main service centres are suitable for larger scale development; that the facilities found in the key villages mean they are suitable for a scale of development that would reinforce their role as a provider of services to a wide rural area; and that the smaller villages are suitable for a scale of development that would reinforce their role as a local service centre or as a provider of services to its own community.
4. The settlement hierarchy is considered to be as follows:
  - Two market towns – Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow
  - 7 key settlements (but only 6 would received development as one, Hatfield Heath, is located in the Green Belt). Elsenham, Stansted, Newport, Great Chesterford, Thaxted and Takeley
  - Settlement A villages with primary school; and
  - Settlement B villages with no primary school.
5. A distribution strategy based on the existing settlement hierarchy would involve the majority of housing development being aimed at the market towns with the key villages taking a lesser but significant amount, and any development in the settlement A and B villages would be minimal.
6. This new distribution strategy is the closest to ‘Option 2’, which formed part of the November 2007 consultation, in relation to the settlements but the scale of development in the settlements is rebalanced. The indicative figures shown in table 1 have been derived from the knowledge of available, suitable and deliverable sites.
7. The Council needs to be clear about the reasons for moving away from option 4 and moving to a different option in the context of changing circumstances, and it

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needs to demonstrate that the evidence base supports the new distribution strategy.

### **Recommendations**

8. That Cabinet approve a strategy of dispersed development reflecting the existing hierarchy of settlements for the preparation of a local plan.

### **Financial Implications**

9. This report is part of an ongoing programme of work to prepare an updated local plan. Budget provision for this activity is made under cost code GPP.

### **Background Papers**

10. 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.

Preferred Options Consultation November 2007 (UDC)  
Further Consultation on Preferred Options February 2010 (UDC)  
Comparative Sustainability Assessment February 2010 (UDC)  
Public Participation on Role of Settlements and Site Allocations January 2012 (UDC)  
Green Belt Scoping report 2011 (UDC)  
Employment Land Review 2006 (PACEC) and 2011 (UDC)  
Air quality 2006; 2010; 2011 (UDC)  
Retail Study 2005 (Hepher Dixon) and 2012 (Savills)  
Water Cycle Study 2010 (Hyder) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2008 (JBA)  
Comparative Transport Analysis 2010 (ECC)  
Commissioning School Places in Essex 2011-2016 (ECC)  
Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and delivery of housing 2011 (UDC)  
Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2009 (ORS)  
Older Persons Housing Needs Study 2011 (UDC)  
Affordable Housing Policy Update Statement 2011-2013 (UDC)  
Historic Settlement Character Assessment 2007 and 2009 (UDC)  
Health Profile 2010; and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Uttlesford 2008 (Partnership of Health and Local Authorities)  
Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment 2012 (ECC)  
Results of Community Engagement:-  
Report of Workshops June 2006 (UDC)  
Questionnaire Results Sept 2006 (UDC)  
Policy Choices & Options Summary of representations Received and Recommendations July 2007 (UDC)  
Summary of Representations Received in Response to the Preferred Options Consultation 2007 (UDC)  
Summary of Comments on Further Consultation on Preferred Options 2010 (UDC0

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Open space, Sport Facility and Playing Pitch Strategy 2012 (TLP)

Appropriate Assessment 2007 (UDC)

Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Assessments 2009 (Fordham)

Local Transport Plan for Essex 2011 (ECC)

### Impact

1.

Communication/Consultation	The distribution strategy will be subject to public consultation as part of the June/July 2012 Local Plan consultation
Community Safety	No direct impacts
Equalities	There are no inequalities identified. This report seeks approval to prepare a plan which directs development to a range of settlements from the towns to the villages and build balanced communities (providing for economic, retail, sporting, recreational, community facilities and places of worship as appropriate) with a mix of house types and sizes, including affordable housing, to meet all needs irrespective of gender, age, race; and accessible to those who have a disability.
Health and Safety	No issues
Human Rights/Legal Implications	No issues
Sustainability	Sustainability Appraisals/Strategic Environmental Assessments have been carried out and will continue to be carried out through each stage in the preparation of an up to date development plan.
Ward-specific impacts	Affects all wards
Workforce/Workplace	No issues

### Situation

11. The Localism Act has given the Council responsibility for setting its own housing and employment growth targets. Cabinet on the 5 April 2012 agreed the preparation a plan based on an annual completion rate of 338 dwellings. Taking

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into account consents the Council needs to find new sites for 3300 dwellings. If Option 4 remained the preferred Strategy this would mean a distribution of 3000 homes as a linked new settlement at Elsenham and 300 to be distributed around the towns and villages. This would result in none or negligible development in some settlements.

12. The key aspects of the evidence base used to establish options for the strategic distribution of development in Uttlesford District are:

a) Key pieces of evidence in making the strategic distribution choice:

1. Green Belt Scoping report
2. Employment Land Review
3. Air quality
4. Retail Study
5. Water Cycle Study and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
6. Comparative Transport Analysis
7. Commissioning School Places in Essex 2011-2016
8. Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and delivery of housing
9. Need for affordable housing and delivery
10. Historic Settlement Character Assessment
11. Health Profile; and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Uttlesford
12. Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment
13. Results of Community Engagement

b) Other evidence with a role:

14. Open space, Sport Facility and Playing Pitch Strategy
15. Appropriate Assessment
16. Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Assessments
17. Local Transport Plan for Essex

c) Constraints: These constraints will guide the identification of sites and the design of sites in relation to the distribution strategy. They are therefore not discussed in detail in this paper:

- Historic features
- Landscape character
- Nature conservation

13. The Appendix to this report identifies the main findings of each piece of evidence base and explains how option 2, option 4 and the emerging option accord with or are at variance with the findings of the evidence.

### **Summary of Findings**

14. The main differences between the Options in relation to the evidence base occurs in relation to air quality; the Water Cycle Study; school provision; housing delivery; need and delivery of affordable housing; and the results of community engagement.

15. A strategy which concentrates development in a new settlement as proposed under Option 4 satisfies the findings of the evidence base in relation to air quality and schools provision; whilst a strategy where development is dispersed but with significant development at Saffron Walden conflicts with the findings of these studies. However Option 4 is not consistent with the findings of the evidence of the Water Cycle Study; the delivery of housing through the plan period; the need and delivery of affordable housing across the district. Whereas, the findings of

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these studies accords with a strategy where development is dispersed across the District with significant development in the towns and key villages.

16. The findings of these studies present both challenges and opportunities with regard to the delivery of all of the options. In relation to all the other elements of the evidence base, both strategies meet or partially meet the findings to varying degrees.

**Conclusions**

17. This paper demonstrates that the evidence shows that no one option is better than the other options in all aspects.

18. The evidence indicates that the main benefits of Option 4 are that it reduces the need for development in other settlements. Therefore, for settlements such as Saffron Walden where there are issues of air quality and education capacity, a smaller amount of growth places less pressure on the existing infrastructure. However it needs to be recognised that this option would result in little if any improvements to the existing infrastructure in settlements other than Elsenham. The Council would need to consider whether it would be reasonable to propose the adoption of a Community Infrastructure Levy that would mainly collect contributions from development in Elsenham to fund infrastructure in other settlements where only limited development would take place. In contrast the evidence indicates that the main benefit of the emerging option is that the development being proposed in the settlements will bring the possibility of improvements to the infrastructure accessible to new and existing residents particularly in Great Dunmow and Saffron Walden. This is especially notable in relation to affordable housing, health, sport and recreation.

**Risk Analysis**

19.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
A distribution strategy is approved which is later found unsound at the inquiry.	2- There is some risk that a distribution strategy will be approved which cannot be justified by the evidence base.	3 If a distribution strategy is approved which the Council cannot justify through the evidence base, the plan will be found unsound. The Council will then have to prepare a new local plan. In the mean time	An assessment of the evidence base has been undertaken and can continue to be undertaken as more background studies and evidence is prepared and considered.

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		the Council will be without a Local Plan and applications will be determined against the National Planning Policy Framework.	
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- 1 = Little or no risk or impact
- 2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.
- 3 = Significant risk or impact – action required
- 4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.