

The Local Development Framework Working Group

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To set up an advisory group to assist in the exercising of the delegated authority of the Spatial Planning Team Leader on all matters relating to the production of the Local Development Framework

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **Three options are presented here for consideration. It is recommended that OPTIONS 2 be accepted as having the most appropriate balance between local democratic interests and the ability to bring specialist knowledge to the advisory group.**

- 2.2 (1) **That a Working Group be set up comprising 12 Members of the Council, one of which shall be a Member of the Executive, one a Member of the Development Control Committee and the remainder comprising two Members from each of the group of wards within the five Community Areas of North Wiltshire.**
- (2) **That a Working Group be set up comprising 12 Members of the Council and 5 Stakeholders invited from the North Wiltshire Community by the Authorised Officer. In respect of Members, one shall be a Member of the Executive, one a Member of the Development Control Committee and the remainder comprising two Members from each of the group of wards within the five Community Areas of North Wiltshire. In respect of Stakeholders, the Authorised Officer shall endeavour to include at least one Member of the Local Strategic Partnership at each meeting of the Working Group.**
- (3) **That a Working Group be set up comprising 7 Members of the Council and 9 Stakeholders invited from the Local Strategic Partnership. In respect of Members, one shall be a Member of the Executive, one a Member of the Development Control Committee and the remainder comprising one Member from each of the group of wards within the five Community Areas of North Wiltshire.**

3. Link to the Corporate Plan

- 3.1 The report is directly related to the Corporate Plan in respect of the delivery of the Spatial Planning priority area.

4. Background

- 4.1 On the 11th of May, the Executive agreed to delegate authority for its responsibilities for the preparation of the Local Development Framework to an Authorised Officer (minute E235). The decision stated:

“Resolved that

- (1) The Spatial Plans Team Leader be given delegated powers for all Local Development Framework responsibilities of the Executive, subject to consultation with a Spatial Planning Advisory Group as constituted by the Executive.

- (2) The Scheme of Delegation be amended accordingly.
 - (3) That the operation of the delegation is subject to the approval and formal constitution and terms of reference of the Advisory Group by the Executive.”
- 4.2 The present Public Spaces and Local Plans Panel (PS&LPP) is not considered to be fit for purpose for the task of Advisory Group. It is too small in numbers to bring a variety of experience to the issues, and does not include member representation evenly across the District as a whole. It operates almost as a quasi-Committee and this does not always allow full and free debate of the issues that arise from development of the LDF. It also offers no opportunity to bring individuals with specific expertise to the table to broaden the scope of the advice available.
- 4.3 This Authority is also currently reviewing its Working Group arrangements and any new LDF Advisory Working Group would operate in accordance with those arrangements.
- 5. Option 1 – an expansion of the present arrangements.**
- 5.1 This is essentially an expansion of the PS&LPP approach. By expanding the number of Councillors involved to 12, this would bring more opportunities for a broader range of representation to the discussion.
- 5.2 The manner in which the Advisory Group operates, however, would be for the Group itself to determine. Given that the Group would not be making recommendations to the Executive but will be giving advice to the Authorised Officer, there will be no requirement for formal reports with “recommendations” as presently occurs. It is envisaged that the arrangements would be more like a “working group” where topics are discussed in a more informal manner.
- 5.3 The expanded representation allows for a more even spread of Member’s interests to be developed. Two Members from each Community Area (at present, they could be elected to the Advisory Group through the Area Committees) would ensure broad representation throughout the District. The inclusion of an Executive Member (at present, this would be the Spatial Planning portfolio holder) would allow a direct reporting back to the Executive. The inclusion of a Member of the Development Control Committee would create a direct link to the main Committee where the LDF will be used on a regular basis, and to alert the Working Group to any policy issues that arise from the day to day Planning decision making.
- 5.4 The principal advantage of a “Members only” group is that it would have a clear democratic foundation to its work. The principal disadvantage is that this would give no opportunity to ensure that other experience from outside the Council is available to the Group in its thinking.
- 6. Option 2 – the inclusion of representatives of the North Wiltshire community**
- 6.1 This would increase the number of members of the Working Group to 17 with the greater majority made up of Councillors from North Wiltshire. This would bring more opportunities for a broader range of representation and specific expertise to the discussion.

- 6.2 Again, the manner in which the Advisory Group operates, however, would be for the Group itself to determine. It would, for example, not be necessary to have a “standing” representation of outside interests as they could be invited to attend by the Authorised Officer or by the Advisory Group as the issues to be debated as required.
- 6.3 The expanded representation allows again for a more even spread of Member’s interests to be developed as set out in option 1. This Council currently administers the Local Strategic Partnership for the North Wiltshire Area. It meets on a regular basis to create the forum for “joined-up” thinking on the provision of public services within the District and the development of the Community Strategy. Given that central government, in its advice on the production of the LDF, recommends that the two processes should support one another, there is obvious advantage in ensuring that there is a representation from the LSP itself on the LDF Advisory Group.

7. Option 3 – taking advice directly from the North Wiltshire Community

- 7.1 This option is included to demonstrate how radical the working group approach to the development of the Local Development Framework can be. The new policy planning system emphasises the “front-loading” of public consultation where the interests of the community are explored in depth at the beginning of the process. Therefore, the role of public consultation has been considerably expanded and local planning authorities are encouraged to obtain a broad range of evidence from its area to ensure that local development documents are relevant.
- 7.2 The process of and methods for public consultation are set out this Council’s Statement of Community Involvement: currently under consideration by the Planning Inspectorate. It could be argued that by bringing interests outside of the Council directly into the development of planning policy, this would be “front-loading” at its most obviously influential.
- 7.3 The Local Strategic Partnership is already constituted from a broad range of interests within or with responsibilities for the North Wiltshire community. It presently meets to consider many aspects of the development of the Community Strategy and the action plans that flow from it. From meetings attended by the Spatial Planning Team, it is obvious that the majority of the issues discussed touch on planning policy in very direct ways. It could be argued that there is no need to invent a broadly representative Advisory Group when one of almost exact purpose already exists.
- 7.4 At present, two Members of the Council are able to sit on the LSP. For the purposes of the Advisory Group function, this would need to be expanded to seven to ensure that there is more even representation across the community areas. The type of organisations that send representatives include the Police Authority and other Services, Chambers of Commerce, Community Groups, Housing interests, and interest from the County Council.
- 7.5 The principal disadvantage is that at present, the LSP is not yet a “stable” group in the sense that attendance by individuals can vary substantially from meeting to meeting. Also, it would be necessary for the LSP members to meet on a more regular basis to ensure that the LDF business is dealt with in a timely manner. It is for these mainly practical reasons that this is not a favoured option at present.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The financial implications are broadly similar to the implications arising from the present arrangements for the Public Spaces and Local Plan's Panel. Where outside representation is included in the Group, there may be a small additional requirement for expenses to be paid by this Council to the representative if required by their organisation.

9. Human Resources Implications

- 9.1 The arrangements for the administration of the Advisory Group would be broadly similar to that currently undertaken. There are no Human Resources implications arising directly from this report

10. Environmental Implications

- 10.1 There are no Environmental implications arising directly from this report, though the subject matter will have a considerable impact on the environment of North Wiltshire.

11. Community Implications

- 11.1 There are community implications arising directly from this report in that the arrangements will directly influence the ability of this Council to respond to the community on planning matters and for the continued involvement of the community themselves on influencing the direction of spatial planning within North Wiltshire.

Documents Used:

- Previous Committee Report to Executive, dated 11th May 2006

**REPORT OF THE PLANNING SERVICES STRATEGIC MANAGER TO THE EXECUTIVE -
15TH JUNE 2006**

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