

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MONDAY 19 MAY 2003 AT 2.00 P.M.

COUNTY COUNCIL

TUESDAY 20 MAY 2003 AT 10.30 A.M.

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY STRUCTURE PLAN
ALTERATIONS 2001 – 2016 DEPOSIT VERSION
– RESPONSE OF GO-EAST**

Report of the Director of Environment

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Agenda Item No.

Cabinet

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1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To advise the Cabinet on the contents of a submission from the Government Office for the East of England, in respect of the deposit version of the Structure Plan Alteration 2001 to 2016

2. Summary

- 2.1 The deposit period for the Structure Plan Alterations closed on 16 April, following a six week period of consultation. As part of the consultation a letter has been received from the Government Office for the East of England (Go-East) which raises issues about the progression of the Structure Plan. Given the content of the letter, the Cabinet are asked to consider its implications for the Structure Plan.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Structure Plan Alterations were placed on formal deposit on 5 March 2003, with the deposit period ending on 16 April. Just over 250 individuals or organisations made representations on the Structure Plan during this period.
- 3.2 One of those representations was from Go-East, which in particular raises a number of issues about the progression of the Structure Plan. A copy of the letter is attached to this report. A copy has already been circulated to all Members of the County Council.
- 3.3 The letter raises a number of issues where Go-East consider that the Structure Plan Alterations have not taken account of new guidance or

emerging policy . The issue of the Plan's compatibility with new Government policy as expressed in the Communities Plan is raised. The Communities Plan was published in February 2003 by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and sets out an "action programme" to achieve a "step change " in housing provision in the Country as whole, but in the South East in particular.

- 3.4 The letter does however acknowledge that because of the uncertainty about what new policy guidance will look like, and very recent emergence of new policy such as the Communities Plan, it would have been difficult for the Alterations to have satisfied all the policy concerns raised.
- 3.5 The next step in the Structure Plan process should be to progress to an Examination in Public (EIP), where all the substantive issues raised through the consultation process could be considered by an independent Panel. The programme for the EIP, was for it to commence at the end of September.
- 3.6 The Go-East letter questions whether it is now appropriate to take the Alterations forward to an Examination in Public, given the policy changes highlighted , and in advance of work on new district level housing figures , which are being prepared as part of the new Regional Planing Guidance for the Eastern Region (RPG 14). It is anticipated that the work on these new housing figures will be completed by February 2004.

4. Options

- 4.1 At this stage of the Structure Plan process, the Government Office letter has the status of a formal submission on the deposit plan, along with the other representations received. It is a clear indication of issues which the Government Office would wish to raise at an Examination in Public . It is also a clear indication of how the Government would view the progression of the Plan towards adoption, and the issues which would be taken into consideration by the Secretary of State, in terms of any decision whether to directly intervene in the plan making process.
- 4.2 Given these circumstances there would appear to be three broad options at this stage :-
 1. We could carry on with the Plan and progress to the Examination in Public in the Autumn. However, we have a clear indication of the issues which would currently be raised by Go-East at any EIP, and the possible impact this may have on the Plan.
 2. We could suspend progress on the Plan. This would give the opportunity to clarify with Go-East the content and substance of their objections. Technical work such as summarising and

considering the representations on the deposit version, and rolling forward technical work such as the Housing Capacity Study, could continue. The decision as to whether to take the Plan forward, could then be based on an assessment of whether work on RPG 14 is progressing to timetable, given that this is a key argument put forward by Go-East for the Structure Plan to stop.

3. We could stop the progression of the Plan completely. Whilst this would appear to be the preferred option of the Government Office, there are a number of practical problems which this would cause, which need to be clarified .One example is the policy vacuum it would leave for local plans in the County. This would become an even more significant issue if the programme for RPG 14 began to slip.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The Go-East letter raises significant issues for how the Structure Plan Alterations should be progressed. The letter repeatedly asks the County Council to consider whether it appropriate to continue with the Structure Plan process, whilst also suggesting that if the Plan is progressed it should seek to comply with emerging policy such as RPG 14 and the objectives of the Communities Plan.
- 5.2 In many respects the letter gives mixed messages, such as praising the approach of the County Council in terms of addressing the use of previously developed land as set out in PPG 3, whilst also suggesting that this cannot be a viable approach to meeting the Government's targets for higher levels of housing provision in the South East.
- 5.3 The Go-East letter does however echo the words of the recently published Supplementary Guidance on Regional Spatial Strategies, which suggests that Government Offices should "encourage county councils and unitary authorities to review their structure Plan preparation programmes and reconsider whether it would now be sensible to redirect the resources towards the appropriate elements of RSS".
- 5.4 Given the contents of the letter and the issues raised, it is therefore appropriate for the County Council to consider whether the Structure Plan Alterations should be progressed further , at this stage.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The County Council has a statutory requirement to prepare and keep up to date the County Structure Plan. Examinations In Public are an essential part of that process.
- 6.2 Budgetary provision has already been made for an Examination in Public to be held this year. Should the EIP be postponed or cancelled, an appropriate adjustment in expenditure for the year will be made.

Background Documents

Sustainable Communities: Building For the Future – ODPM
Sustainable Communities in the East of England - ODPM