

THE EXECUTIVE

9 AUGUST 2004

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

CONSIDERATION OF REPORT OF THE PANEL TO THE EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC OF THE NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY AND NATIONAL PARK JOINT STRUCTURE PLAN REVIEW, FIRST ALTERATION

1. SYNOPSIS

- 1.1 The Examination in Public of the Northumberland County and National Park Deposit Draft Joint Structure Plan was held in March and April 2004. Its purpose was to consider particular issues that arose from the representations to the Deposit Joint Structure Plan where it was felt more information was required. Consideration of the representations to the Deposit Joint Structure Plan resulted in four matters being selected for further discussion. These were: settlement strategy and green belt, housing provision and distribution, employment land provision and distribution, and energy.
- 1.2 In May 2004 the Examination in Public Panel presented their report to the County Council with their recommendations on the matters discussed. Generally it reflects well on the work undertaken in the preparation of the Structure Plan by County Council officers and the broad strategy adopted in the Structure Plan remains intact. This report sets out the County Council's responses to the recommendations of the Report of the Examination in Public Panel. The Panel Report includes 58 recommendations to the County Council and it is proposed that most of these be accepted. There are, however, a small number of recommendations on housing and energy where the Panel's recommendations raise issues for the County Council or can only partially be accepted and these are discussed within this report.
- 1.2 Following consideration of the Panel Report together with the representations received to the Deposit Joint Structure Plan, the County Council will publish Proposed Modifications which will be open to a further round of representations. In the light of representations received the County Council can then decide to adopt the Plan, or to propose further modifications.

2. IMPLICATIONS

Policy:

The Proposed Modifications will form part of the review of the County Council's land use policies. The altered Plan, when adopted, will form part of the County Council's Policy Framework.

Financial:	None.
Personnel:	None.
Property:	None.
Crime and Disorder:	None.
Equalities:	None,
Customer Considerations:	None.

3. CONSULTATIONS

- 3.1 The Panel Report has been distributed to all Structure Plan deposit points in libraries, District Councils, and to participants in the Examination in Public. The County Council has also notified a wide range of stakeholders including Parish Councils, consultants and other organisations of the availability of the report. The proposed responses to the Examination In Public Panel Report have been discussed with officers at Government Office for the North East and the North East Assembly.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 It is recommended that:
- i) the recommendations of the Examination in Public Panel Report are approved, other than those referred to in paragraphs 5.11, 5.13 and 5.21.
 - ii) the Director of Environment and Public Protection, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment, is authorised to agree the detailed wording of policies to be included in the Proposed Modifications and to publish them.

5. BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The main function of the Structure Plan is to establish the general policies of strategic importance for the development and use of land and environmental protection, and as such, provide a framework to assist in delivering sustainable development. In conjunction with Regional Planning Guidance it provides the spatial planning context for the preparation of Local Plans and the forthcoming Local Development Frameworks.

- 5.2 The current Northumberland County Structure Plan, adopted in May 1996, covers the period to 2006. A review of the Structure Plan is therefore being progressed jointly with the National Park Authority to roll forward the policies to 2016 and to take account of changes to national and regional policy and changes in development trends. The amended Plan was placed on deposit during 2003 and the Executive in October 2003 agreed a schedule of responses to the deposit draft representations, and initial matters for consultation through the EIP process.
- 5.3 In the light of developing policy on renewable energy a number of Pre-Examination in Public Changes to the policy approach for energy were proposed. These were consulted on in January and February 2004. A total of 37 responses were received to the changes resulting in 90 separate representations, of which 24 were in support.
- 5.4 The Examination in Public (EiP) was held at Hepscott Park and ran from 2 March 2004 to 5 March 2004 and was reconvened for one day on 6 April 2004. This discussed particular issues arising from the proposals in the Deposit Plan where more information was required before the County Council and National Park Authority could reach a decision. The matters for discussion were settlement strategy and green belt, housing provision and distribution, employment land provision and distribution, and energy. The EIP took place before an independent Panel and participation was by invitation only. The report of the Panel has now been received with its recommendations to the County Council on matters considered at the EIP. In the light of this report and the representations received on the Deposit Plan, the County Council will produce Proposed Modifications later this year. These are open to a further round of representations. In the light of representations received, the County Council can decide to adopt the Plan or further Proposed Modifications can be published.
- 5.5 The Panel Report generally reflects well on the work undertaken in the preparation of the Structure Plan by County Council officers and the broad strategy adopted in the Structure Plan remain intact. The Panel Report has been distributed to all Structure Plan deposit points in libraries, District Councils, and to participants in the Examination in Public. The County Council has also notified a wide range of stakeholders including Parish Councils, consultants and organisations of the availability of the report. A copy has been placed in the Members Library.
- 5.6 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to the responses to recommendations contained in the Panel Report. The Panel Report includes 58 recommendations to the County Council and it is proposed that most of these should be accepted. There are, however, a number of recommendations where the Panel's recommendations raise issues for the County Council or can only partially be accepted and these are discussed in paragraphs 5.11, 5.13 and 5.22 of this report.

Strategy and Green Belt

- 5.7 Current Government policy is to concentrate development on existing urban areas and especially on previously developed land. In parallel to this, rural areas should be sustained and enhanced through the diversification of the rural economy. The overall development strategy within the Draft Joint Structure Plan reflects this policy approach, however, the Panel recommends that the plan should explicitly set out, within a policy, the priority for the majority of development to be located within the settlements of South East Northumberland. Complementary emphasis should also be given to the enhancement of the role of market towns and other main rural service centres to assist rural regeneration. It is recommended that this minor amendment to the presentation of the development strategy be accepted.
- 5.8 Regional Planning Guidance for the North East (RPG1), when adopted in 2002, set the principle of extending the Green Belt northwards to encircle Morpeth in order to protect the openness of the surrounding countryside and the character of the historic town. The purpose of policy within the Deposit Joint Structure Plan is to outline the general extent of the Green Belt in order to provide guidance for detailed boundaries within Local Plans. Whilst the principle of extending the Green Belt was generally acceptable, its extent was debated at the Examination in Public. The Panel have recommended that it should include the villages of Longhorsley, Netherwitton, Hartburn and Belsay but should exclude the Stobswood Opencast site. It is proposed that these minor amendments to the general extent of the Green Belt be accepted.

Housing

- 5.9 National policy advice requires structure plans to reflect the housing requirement set out in Regional Planning Guidance. The housing allocations in RPG1 are based on its strategy of stemming population loss, making better use of the existing housing stock, tackling low demand and abandonment and securing urban renaissance. RPG1 therefore reduced the housing figure regionally compared to what has been planned for in the past, and in particular, reduced it for Northumberland and County Durham.
- 5.10 The principal housing issues discussed at the EIP related to the overall levels of housing provision for the County over the Structure Plan period and its distribution. The Panel considered that there had been no changes in circumstances or new information to justify any recommendation to change the County housing figures included in RPG1. However the Panel acknowledged that there is an issue regarding existing commitments of land that already has planning approval for housing and land allocated for housing in adopted Local Plans.
- 5.11 The Panel proposed that in order to reflect the reality of these existing commitments the housing figures in Policy H1 should be modified, on a District by District basis, resulting, at the county level, in development of 905 dwellings per annum over the period 2002-06. In order to “manage down” housing supply

during this first period they also proposed that Local Planning Authorities should review their outstanding planning permissions and allocations in Local Plans. It is considered that the Panel's total package of recommendations relating to housing numbers, combining a pragmatic approach to existing inherited commitments in the 2002-06 period with measures to "manage down" housing provision to RPG1 level, represents an appropriate way forward and should be accepted. However, the Panel's recommendation on how to "manage down" levels of housing provision is not considered practicable in relation to outstanding planning permissions. This can best be achieved through the adoption of interim housing policies to manage the release of housing sites and through the reassessment of housing allocations as part of the review of Local Plans or preparation of Local Development Frameworks.

5.12 In the post 2006 period, pending the forthcoming review of RPG1, the Panel did not recommend any alteration to the County housing figures. However, it has proposed amending the Berwick-upon-Tweed's allocation to 60 dwellings per annum and reducing the Tynedale allocation by a corresponding amount to 100 dwellings per annum. This is considered acceptable.

5.13 A second key issue at the EIP related to the role of Cramlington within the overall housing strategy. The Panel recommended no change in the role of Cramlington as a sub regional growth point but further recommended that the County Council should undertake a reassessment of the role of Cramlington to ensure that the pace and phasing of development complements policies within the RPG. Whilst the supplementary recommendation is acceptable in principle it is considered more appropriate that any reassessment of its role should take place through the current review of RPG1, rather than in isolation. Prior to any reassessment it is considered that the County Council should remain committed to the completion of the town, while recognising the priority now given to the regeneration of older settlements and widening housing choice through rebalancing the housing stock within South East Northumberland.

5.14 It is considered that all these recommendations should be accepted.

Employment

5.15 The principal issue on employment land discussed at the EIP related to the overall provision of employment land and how policy ED1 interacts with other policies, in particular ED5 and ED6.

5.16 Policy ED1 sets out the sub-regional provision for employment land and the District allocations. The Panel concluded that the County's approach of continuing existing trends in employment land take-up but also reflecting regeneration priorities was appropriate. The Panel recommended increasing the amount of employment land from 185 hectares to 195 hectares to reflect the increase in provision for the Alnwick District by 10 hectares. These changes are considered to be acceptable.

Energy

- 5.17 Current Government energy policy seeks to tackle climate change and ensure security of supply by creating a positive and sustainable framework for energy. There has been a raft of national guidance for energy and in particular planning for renewable energy, including the Energy White Paper and draft Planning Policy Statement 22: Renewable Energy, and regional guidance, principally through the North East of England Regional Renewable Energy Study (RRES). In December 2003, the County Council published and consulted on pre-Examination in Public Changes to Deposit Joint Structure Plan Policies M3 and M4 and text 4.6.7 to 4.6.13. This sought to establish a strategic planning framework for energy development and included policy for energy efficiency, renewable energy, and in particular wind energy, and policy for fossil fuel energy.
- 5.18 There was widespread support for the principle of new Policy M3, which seeks to ensure that energy efficiency and conservation is considered, as a priority, in new development through location, design and layout. The Panel supported the retention of this policy but with minor amendments to wording. It is considered this is acceptable.
- 5.19 New Policy M4 set out the strategic locational framework for wind energy. Having regard to the County Council's response to the Regional Renewable Energy Strategy the policy did not include in the list of wind resource areas, South East Northumberland, Kiln Pitt Hill and Harwood Forest. At the EIP officers of the County Council and the North East Assembly agreed that the South East Northumberland location should be redefined to a wind resource area covering that part of the northern coalfield lying to the north of Ashington and south of Druridge Bay. NEA sought the inclusion of Harwood Forest as a wind resource area and Tynedale Council the inclusion of Kiln Pit Hill. New Policy M5 provided a criteria basis for assessing major renewable energy developments.
- 5.20 The Panel has concluded that whilst policies M4 and M5 are generally consistent with national and regional policy they should be more positively worded and that there should be a single set of criteria for assessing renewable energy projects. They have recommended modifying the locational approach in Policy M4 to only cover areas of least constraint. These areas are Kielder, which is identified as a Strategic Renewables Resource Area and the existing identified wind resource areas to which Harwood Forest, Kiln Pitt Hill and the Northern Coalfield south of Druridge Bay have been added. The Panel considered that the three locations should be added as they had been identified in the Regional Renewable Energy Strategy and there were no good reasons to depart from the conclusions of the strategy. Whilst it is disappointing that the Panel has not accepted the County Council's views on Harwood Forest and Kiln Pit Hill it has been recognised that at this stage all of the locations are areas of least constraint which will be subject to further testing and evaluation. It is therefore considered that the modified policy M4 can be accepted.

- 5.21 Policy M5 has been replaced with a new and more positive policy on major renewable energy projects. However, the policy also recognises that such projects should not be supported and encouraged in international and national designated areas including the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site and can only be justified in such locations in exceptional circumstances. The policy also sets out a comprehensive list of criteria for assessing all renewable energy projects. The criteria are acceptable with the exception of criterion j) which is concerned with the safety of aircraft and the efficiency of radar. These are technical matters covered by statutory requirements or guidance from the Civil Aviation Authority, Civil Airports and Ministry of Defence and consultation procedures in relation to planning applications. It is the responsibility of developers to address any potential impacts before planning applications are submitted. In these circumstances it is considered that recommendation 5.6 is not accepted in that criterion j) duplicates consideration of matters covered under other legislation.

Next Steps

- 5.22 In the light of the Panel Report and the objections received to the Deposit Plan, the County Council will produce a schedule of responses to the Panel report together with Proposed Modifications to deposit draft policies as set out in the Schedule of Responses to the Deposit Draft Joint Structure Plan. These will be open to a further round of representations and it is anticipated that this consultation period will run for six weeks beginning in the first week in October 2004. In the light of representations received, the County Council can then decide to adopt the Plan or, to publish further Proposed Modifications.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Northumberland County and National Park Joint Structure Plan Review, First Alteration, Deposit Plan, May 2003

Report to Executive on Schedule of Representations made on the Deposit Plan and the Response of Northumberland County Council and Northumberland National Park Authority, October 2003

Pre-Examination in Public Proposed Changes to Energy Policy, December 2003

Northumberland County and National Park Joint Structure Plan Review, First Alteration, Report of the Examination in Public Panel, May 2004-07-13

7. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

This report has been prepared on behalf of the Director of Environment and Public Protection.

For further information please contact Ian Campbell on extension 4063.