

Blaby District Council
Local Development Framework – Core Strategy (Issues and Options) further consultation

Background

This document is the first step in the production of the Core Strategy (CS) which aims to set a spatial planning strategy for the District of Blaby up to 2026. It builds on previous consultation on a first Core Strategy (Issues and Options and Preferred Options) that took place in November 2005 and May 2006 (which can be found on the Council's website www.blaby.gov.uk). Version 1 of the CS considered issues such as:

- Location of new development;
- Housing needs;
- Design;
- Designation of rural centres;
- Bio-diversity;
- Historic environment;
- Employment; and
- Developer contributions.

The purpose of this document is primarily to seek the views of key consultees concerning issues that were not addressed in the earlier documents and to inform the policy approach that is considered most appropriate for the District.

This document has been prepared in the context of the emerging East Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)(also known as the Regional Plan), which identified a number of key issues for the District of Blaby, particularly concerning the need for further housing 'growth' and the need for a 'Sustainable Urban Extension' (SUE) "to the west of Leicester in Blaby".

In light of key issues emerging from the RSS and the comments of Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM) on previous drafts of the Core Strategy, a number of key issues are addressed in this document, each with corresponding policy options.

The 'Spatial Vision' and 'Spatial Portrait' (a description of the key characteristics of the District in terms of its environment, population and economy) have been included in the previous version of this document and are not repeated. Notwithstanding this, any comments concerning these and other aspects of the previous version are welcome, and should be addressed in responses to question 11.

Sustainability Appraisal

In order to ensure that the emerging policies balance social, economic and environmental considerations, the Issues and Options paper has been produced alongside a Sustainability Appraisal, which seeks to balance these considerations against key objectives for the District.

The evidence base

In order to inform the key issues that will be addressed by the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy, the Council continues to assemble a robust, transparent and comprehensive evidence base. A list of the key areas of evidence which underpin the key issues are identified after the options.

How this Document is organised

The document identifies some of the key spatial planning '**ISSUES**' that affect the District of Blaby, and possible '**OPTIONS**' for dealing with these.

The document identifies the evidence base required to inform emerging policies. In many cases this is ongoing work that will be available to inform the Preferred Options and Submission versions of the CS.

How to respond to this document

Comments are invited on this consultation document and will be considered along with representations made concerning previous versions (which do not need to be repeated). These comments will help to inform version 2 of the Core Strategy (Preferred Options).

Responses can be made:

- 1) Electronically by using the form available on the Council's web-site www.blaby.gov.uk
- 2) By sending an email to planning.policy@blaby.gov.uk, or
- 3) By letter addressed to: Head of Planning and Environmental Health Services, Council Offices, Desford Road, Narborough, LE19 2EP.

Electronic responses (either using the web-based electronic response form or e-mailing the Word version of the form) would be preferred to paper copies – in the interests of saving paper and ease of recording representations.

Please have a look at the issues and options below and tell us what you think, including whether there are any others that need to be addressed, or whether there are any other sources of evidence required to inform emerging policies.

Next Stages

The programme for the preparation of the Local Development Framework is set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS) which is available on the Council's web-site www.blaby.gov.uk. Following consultation on this Issues and Options paper, a Core Strategy (Preferred Options) version 2 will be prepared. This will be available for consultation between July and September 2008. This will be followed by submission to the Secretary of State in December 2008 for examination in July 2009.

○ **Housing provision**

Issue:

1. The emerging East Midlands Regional Plan states that there is a need to provide at least 8,500* new homes in the District between 2001 and 2026 (340 per year). It is possible that the level of housing will increase in subsequent plans to meet growth in household numbers.

Options:

- Should we provide more than the 8,500 houses required by the Regional Plan in order to anticipate potential increases in household growth and achieve more affordable housing?
- Should the 8,500 new homes be seen as a maximum limit on the number of houses to be provided in the interests of the environment and protecting areas of Countryside and Green Wedges?
- Should some of the housing requirement be phased to later years of the plan (2016 – 2026) or delivered more evenly through the plan period?
- Are there any other approaches to providing the required level of housing that should be addressed in the Core Strategy?

*This may be subject to change following modifications and issuing of the final document by the Secretary of State.

Evidence base:

- Housing Needs Survey (2005)/ Housing Market Area Assessment (expected Spring 2008)
- Blaby District Housing Strategy (Nearing completion)
- Urban Capacity Study (May 2006) / Emerging Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)
- 2004 based household projections (ONS)
- Homelessness Strategy (expected summer 2008)

Q1. What do you think of the options / evidence? Can you think of any others that should be considered?

○ **Location of new housing and Sustainable Urban Extension(s)**

Issue:

2. The emerging East Midlands Regional Plan states that a 'Sustainable Urban Extension' (SUE) should be provided west of Leicester within Blaby District adjacent to the 'Principal Urban Area' (PUA) of Leicester. 4,000 houses* is considered by the plan to be an appropriate number to secure services and facilities that would make the proposal sustainable.

Options:

- **Should the SUE be provided on one site or a limited number of smaller sites?**
- **Where should SUE(s) be located?**
- **Should new housing be evenly distributed between all the towns / villages in the District?**
- **Should new houses only be provided where there is sufficient infrastructure (schools, medical facilities, public transport, shops etc) to support new residents? Should the Council only allow new houses to be built where such facilities are already in place, or should development be allowed where there is scope to enhance existing facilities?**
- **Are there any other approaches concerning a potential SUE that should be addressed in the Core Strategy?**

***The proposed 4,000 house SUE is within and not additional to, the total 8,500 houses proposed for the District.**

Evidence base:

- Housing Market Area Assessment
- Urban Capacity Study / SHLAA
- Leicestershire County Council Highways evidence etc

Q2. What do you think of the options / evidence? Can you think of any others that should be considered?

○ **Effective / efficient land use**

Issue:

3. Government policy advises that land should be used effectively. This means encouraging re-use of land that has been previously developed and converting existing buildings (including sub-division of large houses and redevelopment of large gardens) to residential use. In addition, it states that “using land efficiently is a key consideration in planning” and that “Local Planning Authorities should develop density policies” (with 30 dwellings per hectare being the ‘indicative minimum’).

Options:

- **Should housing be phased so that development of ‘brownfield’ land is encouraged before ‘greenfield’ sites are developed?**
- **Should a minimum density apply to all new housing developments, or should it be flexible to allow for local circumstances? If a minimum density is required, what should this be?**
- **Should development of all sites classed as ‘brownfield land’ (including large gardens and conversion of large houses) be allowed (provided they meet all other planning requirements).**
- **Are there any other issues or options concerning density and brownfield development that should be addressed in the Core Strategy?**

Evidence base:

- Urban Capacity Study / SHLAA
- RSS / Panel report
- CABE assessment of design quality in Leicestershire

Q3. What do you think of the options / evidence? Can you think of any others that should be considered?

○ **Meeting specific housing needs**

Issue:

4a. The population structure of Blaby District is likely to change over the next 20 years. There will be an increasing number of older people and single person households within the District. The structure of housing supply is skewed towards larger owner occupied properties with a limited supply of one and two bedroom properties that results in an imbalance of supply to meet housing needs and demands.

Options:

- **Should policies require a more specific mix of house types (including their tenure, size, type and affordability) to meet identified and emerging needs, or should the mix of housing be left to market forces?**
- **How should housing be provided to meet the needs of older people (aged 55+)? Should housing for older people be: ‘mixed-in’ with new and existing developments; provided in ‘older persons’ villages’; or a combination of these?**
- **Are there any other issues or options concerning meeting specific housing needs that should be explored in the Core Strategy?**

Affordable Housing

Issue:

4b. The average house price to income ratio within the District of Blaby is approx 7:1 (and has increased at a significant rate over the past 5 years). At the same time, there has been under-provision of affordable housing required to meet identified needs in the District. The Core Strategy will need to significantly increase the supply of affordable housing of the right type, in the right place and at the right price. Current thresholds for “qualifying sites” do not allow affordable housing to be sought on schemes providing less than 25 houses (larger settlements) and 15 houses (smaller settlements – less than 3,000 houses).

- **What size of development (in area and number of houses) should qualify for a contribution to be made to affordable housing (qualifying sites)?**

- **Should the level of affordable housing required on ‘qualifying sites’ be a fixed percentage of the total development, or a contribution to a ‘target’ and how should this level respond to changes in the amount of affordable housing required?**
- **What should happen in cases where the requirements for affordable housing makes a development economically unviable?**
- **On new housing development sites, should the affordable housing be dispersed throughout the site, or concentrated in a specific location?**
- **Should a site be identified in / on the edge of suitable rural villages for the development of affordable housing for local people?**
- **Should the Council seek financial contributions towards providing “off-site” affordable housing from new housing developments which are too small (i.e not qualifying sites) to provide them on site?**

Evidence base:

- Housing Needs Survey
- Strategic Housing Market Area Assessment / District of Blaby Housing Market Area Assessment
- Housing Strategy

Q4a. What do you think of the options / evidence? Can you think of any others that should be considered?

Q4b. What do you think of the options / evidence? Can you think of any others that should be considered?

○ **Gypsies and Travellers**

Issue:

5. A recent Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment has indicated that there is a shortfall of up to 10 transit pitches and 26 static pitches for Gypsies and Travellers within the District of Blaby over the period to 2016. Some of this need has already been provided for by planning permission granted since the assessment was carried out. Central Government place a responsibility on Local Authorities to provide sufficient land for Gypsies and Travellers where needs are identified.

Options:

- **Where should new Gypsy and Traveller (G&T) sites be provided within the District of Blaby to meet remaining needs? Should they only be located close to existing towns and villages to allow greater access to schools, shops and other facilities?**
- **Would it be better to extend existing G&T sites rather than provide new ones?**
- **Should there be a smaller number of large G&T sites, or a larger number of small G&T sites?**

Evidence base:

- Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment
- Housing Market Area Assessment
- RSS G&T evidence
- Gypsy counts

Q5. What do you think of the options / evidence? Can you think of any others that should be considered?

○ **Settlement Hierarchy**

Issue:

6. In order to accommodate the houses (and other development) needed in the District up to 2026, it is unlikely that all development could be on previously used land or within a new Sustainable Urban Extension(s). Some houses and other development (including employment, shopping and leisure facilities) may be needed in and adjoining some of the 25 settlements in the District of Blaby.

Options:

- **Which towns and villages should be the focus of any additional development required to meet needs within the District?**
- **Are there any broad locations within and adjoining these towns and villages that would be appropriate to accommodate such development (for example “east of village x” or “north of village y”)?**

Evidence base:

- Transport Assessment of Blaby District (Further work needed).
- District of Blaby village services audit.
- HMAA / SHLAA
- Travel to Work information
- Landscape / flooding studies

Q6. What do you think of the options / evidence? Can you think of any others that should be considered?

○ **Employment Land**

Issue:

7. The Blaby District Employment Land and Premises study identified a need to provide an additional 45 hectares of employment land by 2016, including a new 25 hectare 'strategic site'. The emerging East Midlands Regional Plan does not require a specific amount of employment land but encourages the Council to meet the employment needs of its residents, and those that rely on the District for work in suitable / sustainable locations, now and in the future. Many residents currently travel outside the District to work.

Options:

- **Should Strategic Employment Site(s) be provided on one site or a limited number of smaller sites?**
- **Should a Strategic Employment Site (of approx 25 hectares) be provided as part of a Sustainable Urban Extension within the District? Are there any broad locations that should be explored to provide a large employment site if it is required?**
- **Where should new employment opportunities be provided in addition to those that could be accommodated on Strategic Employment Site(s) (considered above)?**
- **Should new employment sites in Blaby District accommodate a wide range of employment uses (including businesses which offer highly paid highly skilled jobs), or just those uses that cannot be accommodated in town and city centres? Should offices be allowed on sites outside of town centres?**
- **Should land be identified for 'strategic distribution uses' that are capable of accommodating very large warehouses?**
- **What sort of businesses should be allowed to develop in rural areas?**

Evidence base:

- Blaby Employment Land and Premises Study
- Leicester and Leicestershire Employment Land and Premises Studies
- Regional Employment Land and Premises study / logistics study.
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Q7. What do you think of the options / evidence? Can you think of any others that should be considered?

o **Town Centres and Retail development**

Issue:

8. The largest shopping facilities in the District of Blaby are located in the Motorways Retail Area (including Fosse Park, Grove Farm Triangle and Asda site), a large ‘out of town’ development with a sub-regional catchment. Whilst it is economically successful and provides a large number of jobs, it is heavily reliant on car-borne visitors and has impacts on neighbouring retail centres of all scales. In addition it contributes to congestion and poor air quality in the area.

Blaby is the only ‘town centre’ within the District and has some potential for growth. A recent Masterplan has indicated that the town is not fulfilling its retailing potential and its place in the retail hierarchy is threatened as other shopping centres grow and change.

Options:

- o **Should Fosse Park, Grove Farm Triangle and Asda site only be allowed to expand further where there are no other ‘town centre’ alternatives to accommodate development proposals, or should they be celebrated as a commercial success that meets needs on a sub-regional and local scale and be allowed to grow accordingly?**
- o **Should Fosse Park, Grove Farm Triangle and Asda site only be allowed to expand further if a realistic and meaningful sustainable transport alternatives are provided to serve the area?**
- o **Should Fosse Park, Grove Farm Triangle and Asda site be designated a town centre*?**

- **Should Blaby town centre be strengthened and allowed to grow as the retail centre of the District of Blaby and its environs?**
- **Are there any other towns / villages where growth in retail and other town centre functions should be encouraged?**

* 'Town centre' status infers that a number of uses including retail, office, and some commercial leisure uses (amongst others) would (in principle) be acceptable land uses.

Evidence base:

- Retail Study (in preparation)
- Blaby Town Centre Masterplan (March 2008)
- District of Blaby village services audit

Q8. What do you think of the options / evidence? Can you think of any others that should be considered?

- **Renewable Energy and Energy reduction / efficiency**

Issue:

9. Minimising energy use and encouraging renewable sources of energy will contribute to addressing the causes of climate change at a local level. Government policy concerning renewable sources of energy states that Local Development Documents should 'contain policies designed to promote and encourage, rather than restrict, the development of renewable energy resources'.

The District of Blaby could contribute to providing sites for renewable energy (biomass (energy crops), wind turbines etc) and encourage developments that minimise energy use by building in renewable energy principles in their design (such as the use of solar gain, photovoltaic cells (solar panels), bio-mass heating and combined heat and power schemes).

Options:

- **Should the broad locations for renewable energy development be identified?**
- **Should challenging targets be set for the percentage of renewable energy serving new developments and levels of energy efficiency?**
- **What other approaches would encourage new developments to maximise energy efficiency and renewable energy sources?**
- **How can the implications of climate change (such as flooding) be addressed?**

Evidence base:

- Joint Leicestershire Renewable Energy study (in preparation).
- Landscape Character Assessment (in relation to energy installations).

Q9. What do you think of the options / evidence? Can you think of any others that should be considered?

Travel and Transport

Issues:

10. The District of Blaby experiences high levels of congestion and pollution, particularly concentrated in the vicinity of junctions 21 and 21a of the M1 and routes into Leicester City. There are also pockets of congestion (and concentrated Heavy Goods Vehicle movements) in some villages within the District. The majority of journeys are by private car, with limited alternatives in parts of the District. There is a perceived need to improve cycling, pedestrian and public transport facilities. The car is however, important to peoples' mobility and quality of life and needs to be planned for – including parking.

The East Midlands Regional Plan Panel recognised that without significant “action and resourcing” additional development [across the East Midlands] could “worsen existing congestion to an intolerable degree” (East Midlands Regional Plan, Report of the Panel, para 3.29)

Options:

- **Should new development that generates an increase in vehicle movements only be allowed where realistic and deliverable alternatives to the private car are provided?**
- **Should policies seek to balance the needs of car users whilst encouraging non-car use (including cycling, walking, public transport and park and ride), or should disincentives be applied to car use?**
- **What transport alternatives to the private car should be pursued (including specific schemes)?**
- **Should additional Park and Ride facilities be encouraged in the District?**
- **Should greater use be made of railways (including new stations and re-opening of the National Forest Line)?**
- **How could spatial planning policies seek to identify appropriate routes for HGVs?**
- **Are there any other mechanisms that should be addressed to encourage more efficient and effective transport movements across the District?**

Evidence base:

- Transport Assessment of Blaby District Council (To be finalised).
- Potential SUE at Leicester Forest East transport assessment carried out by Leicestershire County Council.
- Ptolemy transport model findings (where appropriate and affordable)

Q10. What do you think of the options / evidence? Can you think of any others that should be considered?

Other issues and Options

Q11. Are there any other issues / options that should be considered as part of the emerging Core Strategy?

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Glossary of Terms

When reading this document you may encounter expressions which you are not familiar with. This section defines and explains these terms.

Affordable Housing

Housing for people who are unable to meet their housing needs through the market. It can include social rented, or intermediate housing (such as shared ownership).

Bio-mass heating

Energy produced by burning energy crops.

Blaby Local Strategic Partnership (BLSP)

A community partnership consisting of a number of partners from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. Also known as 'Blaby Together'.

Brownfield (Previously Developed Land)

Land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure / use as defined in PPG3

Core Strategy (CS)

A key component of the LDF that sets out the vision, spatial strategy and objectives for the District. All other Local Development Documents should be in general conformity with the Core Strategy.

Development Plan Document (DPD)

A Local Development Document that carries Development Plan status. This document will contain policies against which planning applications will be considered.

Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM)

GOEM represents central government in the East Midlands Region. GOEM works to develop government programmes and initiatives at a regional and local level, by working in partnership with relevant organisations to meet local needs.

Intermediate Housing (IH)

Neither Market Housing or Social rented, but is available at a rent / cost falling between the two. IH includes shared ownership / low cost market housing.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan (LLRSP)

The LLRSP (2005) set out strategic housing and employment requirements for the District (prior to RSS). Saved policies are part of the Development Plan.

Local Development Document (LDD)

A document that sets out the development plan policies and supporting guidance for the area. There are three types of Local Development Documents: Development Plan Documents, Supplementary Planning Documents and the Statement of Community Involvement.

Local Development Framework (LDF)

The Local Development Framework sets out, in the form of a 'portfolio', the Local Development Documents which collectively deliver the spatial planning strategy for the area.

Local Development Scheme (LDS)

The Local Development Scheme is a document which sets out the Local Planning Authority's programme for the production of Local Development Documents. The LDS for Blaby District has had effect from May 2007.

Local Planning Authority (LPA)

The Local Planning Authority, in this case Blaby District Council, undertakes the town planning function at the local level (except minerals and waste planning which is undertaken at a County Council level).

Photovoltaic cells (PV) / solar panels

Panels that use the sun's energy to produce energy / heat water.

Planning Policy Statements (PPS)

Government statements of national planning policy which will guide the content of the Local Development Framework.

Principal Urban Area of Leicester (PUA)

The PUA for Leicester, as it affects the District of Blaby comprises the built-up areas adjoining the City of Leicester including Leicester Forest East, Glen Parva, Braunstone Town, Kirby Muxloe and Glenfield.

Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)

The Region wide spatial planning framework setting policies for the social, economic and environmental future of the region.

Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS)

Document produced by Blaby Local Strategic Partnership to enhance the life of residents and businesses within the District by a series of priorities towards environmental, economic and social issues.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA)

Sustainability Appraisal involves an assessment of the social, economic and environmental implications of the plans and policies in the LDF to ensure that all decisions are made with the objective of sustainable development in mind.

Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

A Local Development Document that does not carry Development Plan status but elaborates on the policies and proposals in Development Plan Document's.

Urban Capacity Study (UCS)

A study which assesses the amount of future residential development, from a range of sources, which is capable of being accommodated within the urban area.