

BLABY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report for Information

Date: 1 March 2005

Subject: Local Development Framework Issues Paper and Young Persons Issues Paper responses

Report of: Head of Planning and Development Services

1. Purpose of Report

To advise Members on representations received to the Local Development Framework (LDF) Issues Paper and Young Persons Issues Paper and to advise on the next stage in the LDF process.

2 Background

- 2.1 Blaby District Council has commenced production of its Local Development Framework which will replace the Blaby District Local Plan as the spatial plan for the area. All LDFs must be based on a sound understanding of the area they cover and an informed evidence base. A key component of information gathering is to obtain the views of 'stakeholders'. In order to achieve this an Issues Paper was produced to stimulate thought and obtain responses from a range of interested parties including residents, businesses and other groups with a stake in the 'spatial planning' of the District of Blaby. A version of the Issues Paper was also produced, assisted by the Blaby Youth Forum, specifically for young people. The information gathered will inform future stages of the LDF.
- 2.2 The content of the Issues Paper and Young Persons Issues Paper was agreed by Cabinet Executive on 15th October 2004.
- 2.3 The Issues Papers were the subject of widespread consultation between November 8th and December 20th 2004. Some 400 Issues Papers were mailed directly to key stakeholders including: Elected Members; Parish Councils and Meetings; Local Strategic Partnership; Local businesses; Developers /Agents active in the District; Central, Regional and Local Government; Statutory Consultees and other interest / amenity groups. In addition, six staffed exhibitions were held at venues across the District and a copy of the Issues Paper distributed to all households and most

businesses in the District through the Council's newspaper 'The Blaby Chronicle'. Full copies of both Issues Papers were also placed on the Council's web-site.

- 2.4 The Council's Natural and Built Environment Scrutiny Panel considered the Issues Paper at its meetings of 4th and 29th November 2004. The Panel's comments are attached to this report as Appendix A.
- 2.5 In addition to the Scrutiny Panel's comments and attendance at the public exhibitions, the consultation resulted in some 132 written responses, of which 18 were received from Young People. The level of response is anticipated to be higher at future stages in the process when policies and proposals become more defined and site specific. Notwithstanding this, the level of response and quality of comment was, on the whole, felt to make a useful contribution in the gathering of information to inform future stages of the process. In particular, much has been learnt about potentially more effective methods of consultation.
- 2.6 A copy of the document containing the full responses to both Papers is available in the following locations;
- the Group Rooms and the public reception areas at the main Council Offices;
 - the two Joint Service shops; and,
 - at those Parish Councils which submitted responses to the Issues Paper.
- The document is also available on the Council's website and on request from the Planning and Development Services Division.

3. Issues Paper - Key Issues raised

- 3.1 This section focuses on the key issues raised in response to the Issues Paper consultation.
- 3.1.1 Development of Brownfield / Greenfield Land
- 3.1.2 The majority of respondents (some 80%) who expressed an opinion considered that brownfield sites should be developed before greenfield sites. This generally accords with the policy approach of Central Government and the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan. Some respondents (including developer and business representatives) argued that a more balanced approach should be pursued to the provision of new development, although it is generally recognised that previously developed land should be prioritised where it is sustainable to do so.
- 3.1.3 The Scrutiny Panel recognised the preference for the development of brownfield sites, although with reservations concerning undue concentration of development and rural sustainability.

3.1.4 Design

3.1.5 Responses to the Issues Paper supported a strong policy emphasis on improving design quality. Some concern was expressed about the quality of recent large schemes. Local context and street scene were considered to be important determinants of design quality. Whilst promotion of good quality design was almost universally supported one developer felt that policies should not be too prescriptive. Again a strong emphasis on design quality reflects the views of Central Government which considers good design to be a key factor in achieving effective development. In addition there was strong support for developments that design out crime (itself a key component of good design quality).

3.1.6 The Scrutiny Panel thought that quality of design is a very important issue, even on small scale developments and extensions.

3.1.7 Need for affordable / specialist housing

3.1.8 The majority of respondents indicated a need for affordable and specialist housing (such as starter homes for first time buyers, elderly persons housing and housing for the disabled) in the District. Some respondents (mainly representing the development industry) indicated that housing should be based on an assessment of need. A number of respondents commented on the need to create mixed communities. The Housing Needs and Markets survey which is likely to be completed in summer 2005 will more precisely clarify the requirements for different types of housing, including affordable and elderly persons accommodation.

3.1.9 The Scrutiny Panel recognised the increasing need for affordable housing in both rural and urban areas.

3.1.10 Housing Density

3.1.11 Opinions were divided over the issue of density. Whilst some respondents felt that it was necessary to encourage high density developments in order to protect greenfield land, others felt that it would be detrimental to the character of the area and may result in design and social problems or even the 'slums of the future'. One suggestion was to use the Government's minimum density of 30 units per hectare as a benchmark, but have flexible policies that allow for lower or higher density development in circumstances where the character of the site and surrounding area require an alternative solution.

3.1.12 The Scrutiny Panel was divided on this issue.

3.1.13 Travellers' Sites

3.1.14 The majority of respondents perceived that there was a need for travellers' sites although in many cases this was qualified by an appreciation of the likely difficulties in finding an acceptable site. This approach is one that reflects recent publicity at both a Local and National level that has highlighted the problems of dealing with unauthorised encampments because of a deficit of authorised sites. A limited number of responses felt that such provision was not necessary or appropriate, and in many cases it was felt that suitable sites would be difficult to achieve. No response was received from the travelling community, although a response from the Gypsy Council indicated that the needs of Gypsies and Travellers should be considered in the LDF.

3.1.15 The Scrutiny Panel felt that the Council may need to be more proactive in meeting travellers' needs.

3.1.16 New Employment Sites

3.1.17 The respondents who commented on employment issues placed an emphasis on new employment sites being built within existing settlements. Brownfield sites were considered appropriate where public transport was available. Notwithstanding this, it was recognised that brownfield development may not always be possible given constraints on the availability of this type of land. It was also considered by some that greenfield land would eventually be required. One major local company pointed out the benefits of allowing existing businesses to expand onto greenfield land.

3.1.18 The Scrutiny Panel considered that existing settlements are preferable to greenfield sites.

3.1.19 Mixed-use development

3.1.20 Support for mixed-use developments was varied. Some felt that it was acceptable provided it was integrated sensitively, others felt that it was inappropriate and uses should be separated.

3.1.21 The Scrutiny Panel did not rule out mixed development, but recognised that the scale of employment required would inevitably need some large scale sites.

3.1.22 The majority of respondents felt that existing employment sites could be redeveloped for housing, provided that this should only be allowed where there was no potential of re-using the land for employment.

3.1.23 The Scrutiny Panel did not reach a consensus on this issue.

3.1.24 Conservation of the Built and Natural Environment

3.1.25 Whilst Listed Buildings / Conservation Areas were noted as being of importance, other features of the built environment were identified as being in need of protection. These included important open spaces in urban areas such as village greens, school playing fields and green lungs. Green wedges are considered to be important to maintain the identity of individual settlements. Reference was made to specific settlements that were seen as needing protection, these included the centres of Thurlaston and Stoney Stanton, in addition to the five Conservation Areas that are currently programmed for designation.

3.1.26 The Scrutiny Panel welcomed the protection of Conservation Areas, including the rolling programme of proposed designation.

3.1.27 In addition to Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation , Sites of Special Scientific Interest and other sites of ecological significance, respondents considered existing agricultural land/woodland, ancient woodland, parks, waterways, streams and rivers, river banks/floodplains and ridge and furrow worthy of protection. The importance of green wedges was made by a number of respondents. This was one of the most diverse set of responses to any question within the LDF issues paper.

3.1.28 The Scrutiny Panel felt that the urban fringe at Blaby, as well as other key areas of open space used by residents for recreation, such as Croft Hill and Mill Lane, need protection from inappropriate development.

3.1.29 Shopping and Leisure

3.1.30 Respondents considered that a number of settlements including Countesthorpe, Braunstone Town, Blaby, Leicester Forest East, Glenfield and Enderby were vulnerable to being adversely affected by too many non-retail uses. Of those responses which indicated a desire for more shops in the District a limited number favoured some additional growth at Fosse Park, balanced by a similar number who favoured growth in Blaby Town Centre. Others indicated a need for certain retail facilities in rural settlements.

3.1.31 The Scrutiny Panel endorsed the current policy of protecting the viability of town and village centres. It also felt that growth at Fosse Park would not be in the best interests of Blaby District due to the increase in traffic congestion and deterioration in air quality. However, the Panel would welcome anything that encouraged diversity for shopping areas within the District.

3.1.32 Community and Leisure facilities

3.1.33 A variety of additional leisure facilities have been suggested in response to this question including swimming pools, leisure centres, family orientated parks, gymnasium, drop in bar, squash / badminton / basketball courts, skatepark, sailing / fishing and riding facilities.

3.1.34 The National Playing Fields Association indicated that provision of play and open space should be based on an audit and assessment of local needs as required by PPG 17. Notwithstanding this, several respondents indicated that they considered there to be a need for new play and open space facilities in several parts of the District including Blaby, Braunstone Town, Countesthorpe, Glenfield, Narborough and Whetstone. In addition to providing new spaces it was considered important that the quality of existing spaces be maintained.

3.1.35 The Scrutiny Panel wanted opportunities for the creation of additional parks and leisure facilities, and the development of existing facilities, to be taken when they arise. It had similar comments regarding community facilities. It felt that where new play areas and open space are created on development sites, care should be taken that they do not impact negatively on residents.

3.1.36 Travel, Transport and Communication

3.1.37 Despite some concerns over the escalating dominance of cars in the street scene, this was balanced by a broad indication that cars were considered an integral part of life that should be catered for. The rural nature of parts of the District and the lack of reliable and frequent public transport was considered to result in a reliance on motor cars. Concerns were raised in relation to accommodating, "taming" and managing the car, as well as road safety.

3.1.38 A number of responses supported the principles of increasing more sustainable forms of transport such as cycling. There was, however, criticism of the inadequacies of existing cycling facilities, which leads to conflicts between cyclists, motorists and pedestrians.

3.1.39 Many respondents were in favour of the potential for additional park and ride facilities to be explored, with a number commenting on the success of the existing facility at Meynell's Gorse. However, there was concern that these facilities should not add to traffic congestion and air quality problems.

3.1.40 The potential for new railway stations received general support from

respondents. Stations were suggested at Blaby, Croft, Elmesthorpe and Whetstone on the Leicester – Birmingham line and at Kirby Muxloe on the Ivanhoe (National Forest) line. There was, however, recognition that these suggestions may be difficult to achieve. A few respondents suggested that better use could be made of the existing ‘park and ride’ facility at Narborough station.

3.1.41 The issue of public and private parking provoked a mixed response. Whilst the government approach of minimising parking was recognised, there was a greater concern that inadequate car parking (both public car parks and as part of private developments such as housing) could lead to on street parking and traffic hazards.

3.1.42 A number of village / town centres were seen as having insufficient car parking provision. Narborough, in particular, attracted criticism that insufficient car parking was provided to meet the needs of people using the railway station. Other comments referred to the need to improve facilities at Fosse Park and Blaby Town Centre.

3.1.43 The Scrutiny Panel recognised that the car is an integral part of transport but would welcome policies that protected children and residents in built-up areas. It did not feel that the amount of car parking in new developments should be reduced. It endorsed the provision of public car parking and would welcome more parking at Narborough railway station. It believes that there will be continued pressure for access to the public rail network. Park and ride facilities would be welcomed in the correct location provided that traffic and air quality issues would not be exacerbated for residents. The Panel would welcome working with the Highway authority to establish additional cycling facilities within the District.

3.1.44 Other issues for consideration in the LDF

3.1.45 This sought views on whether other issues, not covered in the Issues Paper, should be considered in the LDF. A wide variety of issues were suggested, of which air pollution and matters concerning transport generated the most comments. Two respondents from the development industry proposed the time period of the LDF should be extended from 2016 to 2021, with a consequent increase in the housing requirement. The broad array of suggestions illustrates the difficulty in endeavouring to address people’s concerns whilst attempting to produce a streamlined LDF.

3.1.46 Priorities for the LDF

3.1.47 It is not possible to deal with all aspects of the LDF simultaneously. This question sought to establish which issue respondents considered to be

their top priority for the LDF. Some 25 different issues were identified, the most popular being whether new development should take place on brownfield land before greenfield sites are developed. Protection of the built and natural environment was also seen as a key issue.

3.1.48 Approaches to consultation in future stages

3.1.49 The final question of the Issues Paper asked for suggestions on the best way of consulting people during future stages of the LDF. A variety of approaches to consultation were suggested including use of local radio, local press and public notices. Other suggestions included holding meetings in village halls, leaflet drops, DVD's, events through schools, providing information with Council tax bills, through Parish Councils (and Parish magazines), by creating a citizens' panel, other panels/focus groups and by liaising with umbrella organisations such as the Council for Voluntary Services. Some respondents considered that the approach taken was 'on the whole OK' and some concern was raised that people should not be subjected to consultation fatigue.

3.1.50 The Scrutiny Panel endorses the current approach taken, however, it feels that Scrutiny should review the approach in future to consider the options available, such as e-mail, the website and DVD and delivering presentations to different focus groups, e.g. the business community and retailers.

4. Youth Issues Paper – Key Issues raised

4.1 Given the relatively small number of responses to the Youth Issues Paper (18) it is inappropriate to draw too many conclusions from the comments received. Notwithstanding this, a number of broad themes are apparent in the responses; Sport is mentioned on numerous occasions by the respondents and is clearly something that young people are interested in and feel should be a priority in the Local Development Framework. Young people identified the sporting opportunities and facilities as something they liked about living in the District of Blaby.

4.2 The theme of sport was reinforced when the respondents were asked which additional leisure and community facilities they would like to see in the District (Questions 11 and 13), the majority of young people specified sporting facilities, suggestions ranging from a swimming pool, leisure centre, gym and dance studio to tennis courts.

4.3 Leisure was another key theme in the Youth Issues Paper. While a number of respondents identified shopping as something they liked about the District,

when asked what they disliked a number of young people stated that there is not enough for them to do in their spare time. Clearly young people would like to have more options with regards to leisure time in the District. When asked if they would like to see additional shops in the District the majority of young people responded by stating that there are enough shops. This would perhaps suggest that while young people do enjoy shopping in their leisure time they are keen to become involved in other activities.

- 4.4 The higher number of responses given to Questions 11, 12 and 13 regarding the need for additional leisure and community facilities and open spaces in the District certainly reinforced the importance of leisure time to young people. The responses again reiterated the issue of young people feeling that there is not enough for them to do in the District, as the majority were keen to suggest additional leisure facilities they felt would benefit the area.

5. Characteristics of Respondents

- 5.1 A detailed analysis of the characteristics of respondents to both the Issues Paper and the Youth Issues Paper is provided in the document which contains the full responses to the Papers (see paragraph 2.6 of this report).

5.2 Issues Paper

5.2.1 Respondents by location -

The largest group (33%) of respondents were located outside of the District; this reflects the fact that a significant number were 'outside organisations' with interests in the District rather than local residents. Of those respondents who are based in the District, the greatest number were in Narborough and Littlethorpe. Other Parishes with a notable number of respondents included Glenfield (although this figure is skewed as Leicestershire County Council is located in Glenfield and there were a number of responses from various departments of the Council), Blaby, Braunstone Town (although considerably lower than the areas' share of the District population), Glen Parva and Kirby Muxloe. The remainder of the respondents were distributed fairly randomly among the other Parishes in the District.

- 5.2.2 No responses were received from residents or organisations in Leicester Forest West, Lubbethorpe, Potters Marston, Sharnford and Wigston

Parva although these Parishes mainly have a significantly smaller population than other areas so this result would appear to reflect the demographic figures. Another reason for this low response could be that some of these parishes are located to the South West of the District and residents may therefore relate more to facilities available in Hinckley which they are more likely to use. Attention will need to be paid in future as to how the District Council can best engage with residents and organisations in Parishes with small populations, those within the south-western part of the District and those within Braunstone Town.

5.2.3 Relationship with the District -

As mentioned the majority (52%) of the respondents were organisations with interests in the District. However, a significant number were local residents. Ideally, however, in future consultations the majority of the respondents would be residents. Therefore, in future, alternative methods of engaging the local community will be explored. A very small number (4%) of respondents identified themselves as being a company located in the District; again this is something which in future this Council will seek to improve upon as local companies constitute an integral part of the business community.

5.2.4 Sex of Respondents -

Disregarding the large number of companies which responded to the Issues Paper, the majority of respondents were male (52.9%), compared to the District as a whole (49.3%). This does not reflect the gender distribution as females constitute the majority gender group (50.7%). More effort will be made in future to engage women in the consultation process.

5.2.5 Age of Respondents-

The age distribution among the respondents clearly demonstrates an under-representation in specific age groups up to 45 years of age. As above, it was not deemed relevant to include companies with interests in the District. Analysis shows that as age increases so too does the number of respondents. This finding contradicts the common view that the over 55's constitute a "hard to reach" group. Based upon the results it would appear that the younger the individual is the more difficult that person is to reach.

5.3 Youth Issues Paper

5.3.1 Location of Respondents-

The respondents were confined to specific Parishes in the District: Blaby; Braunstone Town; Croft; Glen Parva; Leicester Forest East and Whetstone. With the exception of Croft these areas are home to some of the largest populations in the District. However, no responses at all were received from other Parishes with relatively decent sized populations (e.g.

Glenfield, Enderby, Narborough, Kirby Muxloe, Sapcote, Sharnford and Stoney Stanton). The reasons for this are not immediately apparent. It may indicate a need to explore additional methods of consultation or perhaps examine school catchment areas in more detail to ensure that all Parishes in the District are covered.

5.3.2 Sex of Respondents-

The research shows that males are more likely to respond than females which again does not accurately reflect the gender distribution of young people in the District. More effort will be taken to engage females in the consultation process in future.

5.3.3 Age of Respondents-

The majority of the respondents in the survey were of secondary school and college age. As a number of Issues Papers were distributed to secondary schools and colleges in the District this may indicate that intervention from schools is a useful method in engaging young people. However, this also highlights the importance of engaging young people in other age groups.

6. **Next stages in the process**

- 6.1 A report setting out the Council's project plan for its LDF (known as the Local Development Scheme) will be considered by Cabinet Executive on 4th March 2005. This document will set out the key documents that will be produced and their projected timescale. Opinion gathered through the Issues Papers will provide valuable information on the opinions of communities that will be considered when preparing these Planning Documents. Contacts established through the process will be retained on a database and informed of all future stages of the LDF where there will be opportunities to input into the process.

7. **List of Background Papers**

- 7.1 Blaby District Council Local Development Framework Issues Paper and Young Persons Issues Paper (November 2004).