

REPORT TO CABINET:

SECRETARY OF STATE'S PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN
Agenda Item 7a

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Background Papers:- Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the East of England Plan
(can be viewed at www.go-east.gov.uk)
Financial Implications:- No direct implications
Equalities Implications:- None
Legal Implications:- None
Options: To accept the comments set out in the attached report as the basis
of the Council's response or to make amendments to them
Risks: The main risk is that the SoS does not accept the Council's
comments

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the main changes proposed by the Secretary of State to the East of England Plan following consideration of the report of the Panel that conducted the examination in Public of the Plan.

The report identifies a number of areas of concern for this Council as the basis for making representations on the proposed changes.

DECISION

1. That the comments set out in paragraphs 13 to 22 of the report be used as the basis of this Council's representations on the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the East of England Plan and that the Cabinet member for Planning and Rural Affairs submits the representations to Government using delegated powers following further discussion of the changes within the Council and with our partners. The response to include the following points:
 - i) The Plan should recognise the contribution that the District has made to meeting the region's housing needs over the last ten to fifteen years with the appropriate investment in infrastructure and employment
 - ii) The Plan should include a stronger policy that links development to the provision of the necessary infrastructure
 - iii) Concern that the housing figures are now expressed as a minimum. This is likely to encourage unnecessary development exacerbating the problems of infrastructure and employment imbalance and undermining the overall regional spatial strategy
 - iv) Concern that the Plan does not contain clear guidance for LDDs on the minimum level of affordable housing to be achieved and that the 35% referred to in the Plan is expressed as an expectation rather than a requirement
 - v) Concern that the Proposed Changes to the Plan have made it less sustainable.
 - vi) Objection to proposed paragraphs 4.32 and Policy E8 of the Plan which support a new runway at Stansted Airport
 - vii) The Plan should give greater emphasis to rail improvements and improvements to East-West routes
 - viii) The A120 should be listed as part of the Trans European road network in the table of inter-regional linkages
 - ix) Policy T15 should refer to implementing improvements in the London to Ipswich corridor identified by the LOIS study
 - x) Concern that the requirements for other infrastructure such as health, education, adult social care, water and sewerage will now be dealt with in a non-statutory Implementation Plan
 - xi) The reference to a possible extension of the Green Belt to the north of Chelmsford at paragraph 13.61 is inappropriate and should be deleted.
 - xii) Welcome the new Chapter on Carbon Dioxide Emissions and renewable Energy but suggest that these should be backed up by changes to building regulations

EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN: THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE DRAFT PLAN

1. The Government has published the Proposed Changes to the Draft East of England plan, after considering the independent Panel Report published in June. Responses to the consultation on the Proposed changes should be submitted by 9 March 2007. The note below summarises the main points of interest for Braintree District.

Housing provision 2001-2021

	Proposed changes	Panel Report	Draft Plan
Region	508,000	505,500	478,000
Essex + unitaries	124,500	124,500	123,400
Braintree District	7,700	7,700	7,700
Chelmsford	16,000	16,000	14,000
Colchester	17,100	17,100	17,100
Uttlesford	8,000	8,000	8,000
Harlow (incl extensions & N Weald)	16,000	13,500	26,700
East Herts (excluding Harlow N)	12,000	12,000	10,800

2. 44% of the housing provision for Braintree District has already been built 2001-2006, leaving 4,340 dwellings to be built 2006-2021 (an average of 290 per year). Braintree is no longer within a London/Stansted/M11 growth corridor; this has been replaced by the designation of Harlow as a Growth Point and Braintree is now covered by the general spatial strategy policies. In general, development is to be concentrated on urban areas; Chelmsford, Colchester and Harlow are Key Centres for Development and Change.

3. There are 2 important caveats to these figures:

- The figures are expressed as a minimum, and Local Planning Authorities are expected to demonstrate that they will exceed these figures particularly by using previously developed land and reviewing densities.
- Although the Plan period is to 2021 there will be reviews within this period; EERA are already working on the first review of the Plan and the Government has emphasised the importance of good and early progress on this. The Government wants this to examine how housing supply can be increased by reviewing urban capacity and taking on board advice in the Barker report and in PPS3¹. The Plan review will commence in 2007 and finish in 2010 and will cover the period to 2031.

It is too early to judge what the implications of the review might be for Braintree District.

4. Beyond the District, the deletion of the proposed housing allocation at North Weald airfield has been supported; Harlow is to be a focus for growth including to the north and east into Hertfordshire, and Chelmsford is identified as an additional growth town.

5 Employment: The proposed job growth is 452,000 in the region as a whole, compared with a draft Plan figure of 421,000 and a Panel recommendation of 440,000. Braintree is within a Central and North Essex sub-region (which also includes Harlow); the jobs growth target proposed for this sub-region is 42,000 but this includes 11,000 added to reflect direct

¹ Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 3 – Housing published by the Department for Communities and Local Government November 2006. Can be viewed at: http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/931/PlanningPolicyStatement3Housing_id1504931.pdf

jobs growth at Stansted linked to the expansion of Stansted beyond full use of the existing runway once a second runway is built, and about 10,000 more at Harlow to reflect regeneration needs and Stansted-related potential there. However the employment targets are only indicative figures for monitoring purposes, and EERA will need to produce more robust work on employment, including District level targets for monitoring purposes.

6. **Retail:** The Proposed Changes endorse the Panel recommendations on the definition of a hierarchy of categories of town centre, including Major Town Centres (Braintree is not a Major Town Centre). The Proposed Changes state that expansion of existing out of centre regional or sub regional shopping centres will be unlikely to meet the requirements of Government policy on town centres, although views are invited on whether there should be additional retail floorspace at Lakeside.

7. **Infrastructure funding:** the Government has endorsed the Panel recommendations on the need for a region-wide implementation plan and high level regional co-ordinating arrangements.

8. **Transport:** The Proposed Changes have omitted to recognise that the A120 is part of the Trans European Road Network, whereas that recognition has been afforded to the A14. In respect of Stansted Airport, the Proposed Changes reflect the Air Transport White Paper support for development of a second runway. Priority areas are identified for further work to determine the measures needed to tackle congestion and support growth; these include the A12 corridor but not the A120.

9. **Affordable housing:** the Proposed changes endorse the Panel recommendations on an aspirational 35% regional target for new planning permissions.

10. **Water:** The Proposed Changes contain proposals relating to sustainable development including in relation to water efficiency. A policy has been added on water resource development.

11. **Carbon Dioxide Emissions and Renewable Energy:** A new chapter in the Plan is proposed dealing with energy efficiency with a stronger emphasis on carbon dioxide emissions and including the development of regional trajectories for the carbon performance of new residential and commercial development. This includes targets for 14% of the region's electricity consumption to be met from renewable resources by 2010 and 44% by 2020.

12. In response to the changes EERA has already expressed concern about the Stansted policy, housing provision levels, and the need to secure greater infrastructure funding.

Comment

13. Responses to the proposed changes must be submitted by 9th March 2007. At this stage it is not possible to make a definitive recommendation on the Council's response. Further consideration needs to be given to the implications of the changes and there needs to be a discussion about the changes within the Council and with other Essex authorities and with EERA. However the following comments are made to act as the basis of our response to the Government and as the basis for further discussion.

14. The overall level of growth for the District at 7,700 dwellings for the period 2001 to 2021 remains unchanged from the Draft Plan and is in accordance with the representations that this Council made on the Plan at the Examination in public. This figure is therefore considered to be acceptable. However changes to the Plan are proposed that affect our neighbours. Chelmsford has now been added as a Key Centre for Development and Change and additional growth is proposed for Harlow beyond 2021. Colchester and the Haven Gateway and the Cambridge sub-region are also identified as growth areas. The level of growth now proposed for Braintree District is about half the rate that has been

experienced over the last ten years. The justification for this was that the recent high levels of housing growth have not been matched by employment growth and provision of infrastructure and that a period of lower growth is required to enable these to catch up. Now that the areas around Braintree District have been identified for growth there is a danger that this District will be overlooked for investment. Representations should therefore be made to ensure that the contribution that this District has made to meeting the region's housing needs over the last ten to fifteen years is recognised with the appropriate investment in infrastructure and employment.

15. At a more general level there is concern that the overall levels of growth now proposed for the region are too high and will not be matched by provision of infrastructure. This point was discussed in some detail at the examination in public and EERA proposed a policy that would link development to the provision of the necessary infrastructure. This was not supported by the Panel. Although the Secretary of State's proposed changes recognise that significant investment in social, environmental and physical infrastructure will be required to secure sustainable development it falls short of including a policy that would link development to the appropriate provision of infrastructure. Instead it is proposed that EERA will prepare a non-statutory Implementation Plan to cover these issues. Consultation on this Plan is expected shortly. It is considered that a representation should be made that the Plan should include a stronger policy that links development to the provision of the necessary infrastructure.

16. For housing the Secretary of State is proposing to change the wording of Policy H1 so that the District allocations are regarded as minimum targets to be achieved rather than ceilings which should not be exceeded. It is suggested that higher figures may be achieved without breaching environmental limits or infrastructure constraints by:

- Increasing densities
- Encouraging opportunities on suitable previously developed sites
- Making best use of policies on exception sites to provide affordable housing in rural areas

The housing figures are also expressed as an annual average rate with authorities required to meet the annual average rate as soon as possible (we are already exceeding this figure for Braintree District). There is therefore a risk that Policy H1 will lead to higher levels of housing growth exacerbating the problems of infrastructure and employment imbalance and undermining the original justification for a slower rate of growth in this District. The Policy also states that there should be an assumption that the annual average rate of provision during the early years after 2021 will be the same as for 2006 to 2021. It is therefore considered that representations should be made to ensure that housing provision is in accordance with the District allocations and that they are not significantly exceeded.

17. For affordable housing the Draft Plan stated that "Affordable housing must constitute at least 30% of housing supply in all local authority areas, though the overall aspiration is to secure at least 40% where housing stress warrants higher provision". The Proposed Changes now no longer set a minimum provision for authorities to achieve and instead refers to an expectation that some 35% of housing coming forward as a result of planning permissions granted after the adoption of the RSS will be affordable. The Plan should include clear guidance for local development documents on the minimum level of affordable housing to be achieved.

18. For employment there is still a lack of any figures at District level and this is to be the subject of further work. This may cause problems for the preparation of the local development framework. Braintree is included within the Central and North Essex Grouping with as a starting point an indicative jobs target of 21,000 to be shared between Harlow, Uttlesford, Chelmsford, Braintree and Maldon. The Secretary of State is proposing to add 11,000 jobs to reflect growth arising from the construction of a second runway at Stansted

Airport. It is considered that the assumption in the Plan that a second runway will be built should be challenged.

19 For transport although the A120 Braintree to Marks Tey scheme is listed as one of the schemes in the Regional Funding Allocation not yet approved it is not listed as part of the Trans European Road Network in the table of inter-regional linkages. A representation therefore needs to be made to ensure that this is included. The proposed changes to policy T15 on Transport Investment Priorities identifies the London to Ipswich corridor as an area likely to come under increasing transport pressure as a result of underlying traffic growth and the development strategy of the Plan where further work should be focussed to identify the interventions needed. This is also illustrated on a plan at the end of the document. This fails to recognise that a study has already been carried out i.e. the LOIS study, which has already identified the improvements required. Action is needed on the implementation of these improvements and these should not be delayed pending further studies. A representation should therefore be made so that Policy T15 refers to improvements in the London to Ipswich corridor identified by the LOIS study. The plan also needs to be more specific in supporting improvements to rail services.

20. The Proposed Changes include a new section on Chelmsford as a Key Centre for Development and Change. This includes a statement that “A strategic review of the Green Belt is not ruled out as an option if LDDs were to find this the most sustainable way of meeting development needs. If taken forward, such a review should provide for compensatory extensions to the Green Belt to the north of Chelmsford.” There is a concern that an extension of the Green Belt to the north of Chelmsford could increase the pressure for development in Braintree District. The statement is inappropriate as it speculates on the strategy to be included in Chelmsford’s LDDs.

21. The new chapter on carbon dioxide emissions and renewable energy is to be welcomed. These policies should however be backed up with changes to building regulations.

22. Although there has been a sustainability appraisal of the Proposed Changes there is concern about whether this suitably reflects the amended Plan as a whole or just the Proposed Changes themselves. The Proposed Changes may have made the Plan less sustainable.

23. At this stage these comments are preliminary only and are for further discussion both within this Council and with our partners. It is proposed that the Cabinet member for Planning and Rural Affairs should submit our representations under delegated powers following these discussions.