

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Head of Natural and Built Environment

REPORT NUMBER **G38**

TO: STRATEGY COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 28 June 2007

TIMETABLE FOR REPLACING BAERGH'S CURRENT LOCAL PLAN

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report seeks Members' agreement to a new programme for replacing the Council's current Local Plan through a new 'Local Development Framework' (LDF). This programme will be set out in a formal document known as Babergh's 'Local Development Scheme' (LDS). The report also seeks Member's agreement to delegating responsibility for future changes to the LDS to the Head of Natural and Built Environment.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Members agree to the programme attached as Appendix 1 for replacing the Council's current Local Plan with a new 'Local Development Framework'.
- 2.2 That authority be delegated to the Head of Natural and Built Environment to approve changes to the Council's LDS in future (although these would still need to be approved by GO East) subject to such changes not raising significant issues in relation to the Council's policies or financial interests.

The Committee is asked to make recommendations to Full Council on the above matters.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 None, as preparing the new LDF is the core activity of an existing dedicated team – the Planning Policy section of the Natural and Built Environment division.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
(a) The Council fails to agree an acceptable programme or	(a) Unlikely	(a) Medium (but Council could set a different programme)	(a) Avoidance through a sound explanation that the proposed approach is the most appropriate under the circumstances

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
(b) fails to deliver the programme on time (most likely as a result of staffing shortages)	(b) relatively unlikely	(b) Medium (would probably result in a financial loss through failure to attract Planning Delivery Grant in future)	(b) The LDS contains a purpose-built risk management / contingencies section

2. **KEY INFORMATION**

- 2.1 Babergh produced and agreed its first LDS programme back in March 2005, soon after the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of 2004 introduced the requirement to do this. However, this was produced in some haste, it is fair to state, while the Local Plan Inquiry was still in progress. Accordingly, with the benefit of hindsight, it is now possible to observe that the programme was not realistic or achievable. The Council now also has the considerable benefit of reviewing the experience of other local authorities around the country in preparing their LDFs. Some minor changes to the original LDS that were essentially very limited in their effects were agreed in late 2005. However, a suitable opportunity to carry out a far more fundamental review and to produce a new programme guided by the key principles of being realistic and deliverable was not available to the Council until now and this also had to wait until well after the Local Plan was adopted, in June 2006. The lifespan for the current Local Plan lasts until 2016 and clearly it is imperative for the Council to put into place a complete new LDF before this Plan expires.
- 2.2 Before producing a replacement Plan, bearing in mind how fresh the adopted Plan still is, officers consider that the priority should be on implementing the existing Plan effectively. Accordingly, it is proposed that we enable ourselves to do this with the benefit of new ‘Supplementary Planning Documents’ (SPDs) to deliver affordable housing and to protect the district’s threatened employment land supply. Although the Council will be reviewing its corporate priorities in the near future, the delivery of affordable housing can reasonably be expected to remain an important issue for Babergh, with house price growth continuing to outstrip the ability of residents to pay them. The Council also continues to face ‘hostile’ proposals to redevelop its scarce supply of employment land for new housing because of the great differences in comparative land values and a belief among landowners and developers that brownfield land is only needed to deliver new housing and not appropriate for employment re-use, for some inexplicable reason.
- 2.3 A key feature of the new Development Plans system is that the new LDFs will comprise a suite of individual documents that when taken together will make up an overall LDF. Thus it is now possible, and also considered highly beneficial, that these individual documents can be produced to different timeframes. Another key feature is a new emphasis on Plans being much more strategic in nature. LDFs have to set out a clear vision and strategy for how the Council sees its area in the future in terms of the extent and nature of change or evolution or, for example, whether the emphasis would be on limiting change to the minimum. Such key questions and making all the most difficult and controversial decisions, including setting the principles of the overall development strategy and where the bulk of future development would be located, need to be made upfront and set out in the Council’s initial and over-arching Core Strategy. So, Babergh needs to produce and agree its Core Strategy first.

- 2.4 Once this key document has been produced and passed the test of ‘soundness’ as it is now known, the remaining subsidiary and more detailed documents can then be produced. In Babergh’s case, the next priority is considered to be reviewing its detailed development control policies, although our existing policies are considered to serve the district relatively well and this means that carrying out a fundamental review is not urgent, having only finalised our policies in the middle of last year. Finally, although there are issues about employment land supply, and its protection in particular, officers consider that sufficient land has already been allocated in the current Local Plan to provide for our known housing land needs in particular for most (and possibly all) of the period through to 2021, as currently required under the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (the East of England Plan). Therefore, this that producing the Council’s site specifics document required to allocate new land and sites will be the last document that we need to produce and the programme accordingly allows for this to take place after preparing the other two main documents.
- 2.5 In preparing this programme, officers have invested a very substantial amount of time and thought and have been guided by the key principles of realism and deliverability, given the level of resources available to the team. The programme has already been approved by GO East (and in turn the Planning Inspectorate) as required by the regulations, through a process of negotiation and explanation of the Council’s thinking. The agreement of Members will allow Babergh to put this new programme into effect when approved by full Council. A final point is the need to bear in mind that it is possible that in future the award of Planning Delivery Grant will be increasingly tied in with the Council achieving progress in developing its LDF against the ‘milestones’ set out in the LDS and this is another key reason why the programme needs to be deliverable and realistic.

3. **APPENDICES**

- (a) Appendix 1: Copy of new Babergh LDS (tracked changes version to show the changes made)

BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:

None

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