

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Corporate Support Manager

REPORT NUMBER **E293**

TO: STRATEGY COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING 9 March 2006

ODPM Consultation ‘Local Strategic Partnerships; Shaping their future’

1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Government has produced a consultation paper ‘Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their Future’ that invites responses on the future development of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs).

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the Committee agrees that Appendix A be approved as Babergh’s response to the consultation document.

The Committee is able to resolve this matter.

3. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 None

4. **KEY INFORMATION**

- 4.1 The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on local authorities to develop a Community Strategy. The Community Strategy was to be produced in partnership with the other public sector organisations, the private and voluntary sectors. This could be done through an LSP although an LSP was not statutorily required if the area did not receive NRF funds.
- 4.2 The consultation paper re-examines the role, governance and capacity of LSPs and Community Strategies. The paper is based on a growing body of research conducted for ODPM and others on the development and success of LSPs and Community Strategies.
- 4.3 A number of discussions with key national, regional and local partners have led the government to identify a number of key ambitions for the future development of LSPs. These are set out below.
- Commitment to the LSP system of partnership and the Sustainable Community Strategy as an overarching plan
 - Evolved role for local authorities in facilitating action through the LSP and Community Strategy
 - LSPs able to identify and deliver priorities for joint action in an accountable way
 - LSPs better able to support neighbourhood engagement
 - Effective, transparent and accountable governance and scrutiny arrangements

5. **APPENDICES**

(a) Response to ODPM

6. **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:**

ODPM – Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future

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Babergh District Council response to the ODPM consultation document

Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future

Babergh District Council welcomes the consultation document on the future development of LSPs to improve their ability to deliver an increased quality of life for people in the community.

Babergh District Council covers South Suffolk, a predominantly rural area covering some 240 square miles and serving a population of 84,800. There are three LSPs that cover varying parts of the district: the Suffolk Strategic Partnership covering all of Suffolk; the West Suffolk LSP covering St Edmundsbury Borough Council, Forest Heath District Council and the West of the Babergh District; and the Babergh East LSP covering the east of the Babergh Council area. It should be noted that this response is from Babergh District Council and not the LSPs either jointly or separately

General comments

The consultation document provides a useful commentary on the progress and issues of LSPs and Community Strategies to date. However, what it fails to do is identify ways of addressing the issues highlighted.

The document continually identifies local authorities as needing to play a leadership role, in partnership with others, in driving the LSP. The Council supports the concept of local authorities as community leaders and works to provide such a role within its locality. That said, we feel the document needs to be more cautious on the call for local authorities to lead. Many authorities have invested resources in gaining shared ownership of the LSP, so that it isn't seen purely as the responsibility of the local authority. These subtleties in leading need to be reflected to ensure other partners don't revert to seeing the LSP as solely a local authority responsibility.

There is often a lack of clarity around two-tier arrangements throughout the document.

The role of LSPs and Sustainable Community Strategies (SCS)

- 1. Do you agree that the key role of the LSP should be to develop the vision for the local area, through the Sustainable Community Strategy and the 'delivery contract' through the LAA?**
- 2. We believe it is important that LSPs reflect regional/sub-regional plans where relevant in their Sustainable Community Strategy priorities and that regional organisations and partnerships take account of key local needs. How can this greater co-ordination best be facilitated?**

3. Would a requirement on bodies producing theme or service-based plans to 'have regard' to the Sustainable Community Strategy in doing so and vice versa, increase the LSP's ability to take the over-arching view in an area?

The Council agrees that LSPs should develop the vision for the local area and articulate this through the SCS. The Council also agrees that the LSP should provide the strategic co-ordination within an area and link with relevant plans and bodies at a range of levels. However, we don't feel the need to place a requirement on bodies to 'have regard' to the SCS as this has tended to occur over time as LSPs have become more established, and have built working links between the various bodies and partnerships within their locality.

With regard to the LAA, we agree that there needs to be a close synergy between the SCS and the LAA to ensure priorities for the area are delivered. However, LSPs should be driven primarily by local priorities, not the implementation of government programmes.

We think the consultation document over simplifies the complexity of developing and delivering the LAA in two tier areas. In Suffolk the LAA is in part delivered by LSPs, other partnerships and through individual partners. There is also a risk of the LAA being seen as the sole purpose of the LSP and areas of activity that are not part of the LAA blocks become sidelined.

We agree that the links between regional and sub/regional plans and the Community Strategy are important and that these links should be strengthened. However a balance does need to be achieved between delivering regional plans and genuine local priorities.

Whilst an agreement between regional bodies and the LSP would be an appropriate way to achieve greater co-ordination, the capacity issues for LSPs and regional bodies must be taken into consideration. Greater co-ordination could be achieved through using the regional LSP network.

4. Are the proposed steps in the development of a Sustainable Community Strategy correct?

We agree with the proposed steps for the development of a SCS, indeed we consider that it is a framework, which is already used by the majority of LSP's. However, to encourage innovation we would suggest that these steps are not overly prescriptive and that they are for guidance only.

5. What more could be done to ensure Sustainable Community Strategies are better able to make the links between social, economic and environmental goals and to deal more effectively with the area's cross-boundary and longer-term impacts?

Sustainable development should be central and should be given greater emphasis. Environmental impact assessment should be built into the community strategy and challenging targets are needed

Engagement

- 6. What should be the role of the LSP in supporting neighbourhood engagement and ensuring the neighbourhood/parish voice, including diverse and minority communities, is heard at the principal local level?**
- 7. In two-tier areas, is it most appropriate for the responsibility for neighbourhood engagement to rest with the district level LSP?**
- 16. How can the neighbourhood and parish tiers be involved most effectively on the LSP on a) the executive and b) individual thematic partnerships?**
- 17. How can the private, voluntary and community sectors be involved most effectively on the LSP as a) the executive and b) individual thematic partnerships?**

Neighbourhood engagement is critical to the success of LSPs. It would be useful to have clarity on the term 'neighbourhood' as this will vary depending on the location. The council agrees that the involvement of local people is central to the effective development and implementation of community strategies and the key to longer term change. Community strategies offer the opportunity to put people at the heart of partnership working and should be grounded in the views and expectations of those people.

Parish plans provide a key element in coordinating the needs and aspirations of rural areas. The Babergh East LSP has been very proactive in engaging and establishing links between the LSP and the Parish Councils. The Parish Plans are starting to be used to identify projects for funding in target areas.

The Council does not agree that the responsibility for neighbourhood engagement should rest entirely with LSPs at the district level. What is required is an effective co-ordination between LSPs in two tier areas to ensure that consultation and engagement is as joined up as possible, that resources are pooled and that partners of LSPs can all benefit from the work undertaken, and duplication minimised.

Within Suffolk there has been a good level of engagement from both parish and town councils, and the community and voluntary sector. The umbrella organisations have tended to represent their members at the county level whilst local groups have become members of their relevant LSPs either as board members or on relevant thematic groups. Public sector agencies have been proactive in engaging other sectors. In the West Suffolk LSP there has also been success in gaining private sector buy-in. Ultimately, organisations

will see the merit of being part of the LSP when they are able to see tangible benefits to their involvement.

Local Development Frameworks (LDFs)

8. How can spatial planning teams best contribute to Sustainable Community Strategies through the LSP and ensure that LDFs and Sustainable Community Strategies are closely linked?

9. How could revised guidance and accompanying support materials best ensure that Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks join up effectively?

The linking of SCS and LDFs should help to ensure that a set of joined up policies and frameworks for action are established, which was one of the key objectives of the reform to the planning system.

LDFs and SCSs have a common purpose in terms of assisting in the delivery of sustainable development at a local level. This shared purpose provides a good starting point for the development of relationships between SCSs and LDFs.

A key factor for creating synergy between the LDFs and SCSs will be timing issues of production of the LDF or the SCS. The LDFs are constrained by a statutory timescale for production and review into which the SCS will have to fit. The opportunities for joint consultation will be particularly constrained by these timing differences. However, it is suggested that spatial planning teams can best contribute to SCSs through the LSP through the following;

- The LDF should be promoted as a delivery tool for the SCS which would help achieve the objectives of the LSP. The flexibility and speed of the LDF, could allow the processes to be closely aligned, with certain processes being undertaken jointly.
- Spatial planners should identify opportunities to compare, link and merge SCS and LDF 'Area Action Plans' to strengthen deliverability and maximise benefits for local communities
- The LSP and planners should work closely to identify actions in the SCS which have a spatial component and integrate into the LDF
- Identify those land use related aspects of the SCS to which 'planning gain' could be used i.e. the delivery of community facilities, schools and health services
- Where appropriate, and where it reflects the communities aspirations, the vision and strategic objectives in the SCS should be adopted in the LDF

Two-tier areas

10. Should every local authority area have its own LSP?

11. Would the establishment of a greater delineation of roles between county and district LSPs as suggested be sensible?

14 We believe that the geographic boundaries of partners within LSPs is important. What do you see as the opportunities for, and barriers to, co-terminosity shared geographic boundaries?

We believe that every local authority area should be covered by an LSP at the lower tier level, but that it shouldn't necessarily have to relate to the District/Borough council boundary, or be exclusive to each local authority. We believe that there should be flexibility to allow the most sensible arrangements to meet local need.

Coterminosity is a major issue within Suffolk as partners' boundaries are not coterminous. Within the Babergh District Council boundary we have two LSPs at a district level that link, in part, to the PCT boundary areas. This arrangement best serves the differing needs of the district. Whilst this has been beneficial to the communities we serve it has created capacity issues in resourcing the LSPs. Additional resources are also required when trying to evidence need from data that is not available below district level and in performance management, when data has to be remodelled to fit differing areas.

Partners are continually working to differing boundaries and the system needs to be flexible enough to allow for LSPs to sit most comfortably and appropriately over those boundaries.

Governance

22 Should each partnership be encouraged to produce protocols or 'partnership agreements' between partners to ensure clear lines of accountability for the delivery of agreed outcomes?

13. We believe that a rationalisation of local partnerships would help the LSP executive take an effective overview. Would clustering partnerships around the four LAA blocks be a sensible way to achieve this?

Most LSPs have developed an executive board and thematic approach to their structures, but what is less developed is the accountability of those members of the board. This is beginning to be addressed in areas that have not been in NRF areas but are now receiving funding through the LAA. We believe that a 'duty to collaborate with the local authority' or the need to produce protocols may be necessary in some areas where there is a lack of cooperation. However, where cooperation and joint working is taking place this could have a negative impact on organisations who will see themselves being subjected to the local authority will. The community and business sectors may also see this as a step they are unwilling to take at this stage. Guidance on best practice may be useful for areas where such tools are

needed, but it is our view that local flexibility is needed to ensure that partnerships continue to develop in a positive way that meets local circumstance.

24.What do you see as the key role for executive councillors within LSPs?

25.What do you see as the appropriate role for backbenchers particularly in ensuring a high quality of local engagement?

26.What would make councillors' powers of overview and scrutiny more effective in scrutinising the 4 blocks of the LAA?

These are not appropriate for Councils like Babergh that operates an “alternative arrangements” committee system.

We believe that greater clarity is needed around the overview and scrutiny function. There is no identification of how this could work in a two-tier area, nor in Council’s run on a committee structure.

15.Within the LSP framework and its established priorities, would the creation of single delivery vehicles to tackle particular issues be helpful?

We do not think that the creation of single delivery vehicles, for all areas, would be helpful as they may be unsuitable bodies for addressing the issue in that area . It is important however that local flexibility is maintained.

29.How can we maximise the opportunities for joint policy and joint activity on community engagement, including the LDF, the LAA and the Sustainable Community Strategy?

30.How can accountability to local people and businesses be enhanced?

The SCS will form a longer term strategic vision for the area, with the LDF delivering the land use aspects of this vision. Local planning authorities should be feeding back the non spatial planning elements of an LDF to the LSP which will then help inform the SCS. We consider that SCSs need to concentrate on developing a strategic vision for the area, rather than trying to tie in with existing policy activity. However, given current government guidance planners and the LSP should be working together closely to maximise opportunities for joint working, particularly in respect of the statutory LDF consultations. It is important to ensure that reviews of the SCS and the LDF are running on a similar timescale to make best use of LDF consultation period.

32. What extra or different support would be most helpful in shifting to a more delivery focused role?

Financial resources would be an effective way to help delivery. In Suffolk LSPs are receiving a portion of the Pump Priming and Performance Reward grants. This will help us to assist in achieving LAA targets and other targets identified locally. Other funding for action and core funding would also be helpful. With Local Authorities and other statutory bodies being financially squeezed it is unlikely that the LSP guideline to 'reallocate resources' and 'joint funding' can be achieved. Therefore outside funding becomes more important.

35. What learning or development do you feel is required by LSPs in order to deliver sustainable communities that embody the principles of sustainable development at the local level?

It is important to liaise with appropriate organisations such as the Environment Agency, Wildlife Trusts. However there is much to learn for non-specialist and some training could be delivered for instance through LSP Regional Networks

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