

**EAST GRINSTEAD STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT  
“QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS”  
VIABILITY**

**1. Does the viability concern raised by the consortium mean that the ‘full scheme’ is now dead in the water?**

The full strategic development of 2,500 homes is contingent on the delivery of an A264 – A22 relief road. It has always been understood and accepted that the developers would wholly fund the delivery of the relief road. The developers are now stating that the cost of delivering the relief road (along with all other infrastructure requirements) means that the ‘full’ scheme is no longer viable. This is a clearly an important consideration, which could ultimately mean that a road proposal would fail through lack of funding. However, it does not necessarily mean that a full scheme is now dead in the water:

- other funding sources could be secured (see question 2 below);
- the economy may have picked up by the time the Core Strategy is adopted and/or strategic housing development at East Grinstead has commenced
- the South East Plan (when adopted) may require Mid Sussex District Council to pursue the full strategic development (see question 4 below).

Furthermore, it should also be remembered that scheme viability is one of a number of important considerations that would need to be addressed before any scheme is progressed. For example, other fundamental considerations would include: cross boundary working; infrastructure provision; environmental impacts; and transport assessments.

**2. Can the relief road be funded by other means?**

- Other funding sources for a road scheme of this nature are potentially available (e.g. Regional Transport Board etc). A ‘County road scheme’ could therefore secure other forms of funding which could be put alongside developer funding to secure timely delivery. However, the initial view is that it would be difficult to secure funding contributions for this scheme, as other projects elsewhere that are programmed would be given higher priority.
- All developments in and around East Grinstead could make a reasonable contribution to a relief road. Securing money for the relief road from all developments, rather than from just from the developers of the strategic location, would increase the contributions towards this particular element of infrastructure but, in doing so, this would decrease the amount that would be put towards other important elements of infrastructure in the town.

**3. How would any alternative proposal be progressed?**

If an alternative proposal is to be progressed, the Council will reassess the options for development in East Grinstead during the progression of the district wide Core Strategy. This would allow for the consideration of development proposals at East Grinstead to be considered formally within the context of development in the district as a whole.

The District Council will work together with our key partners at the Town and County Councils, as well as stakeholder groups, neighbouring authorities and the developers to progress an alternative approach to development if one is required. The Council will seek to ensure that any proposal for strategic development in the town delivers, in a timely fashion, the infrastructure needed to create a sustainable and prosperous future for the residents of East Grinstead.

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The Core Strategy will set out the development principles and policies that will need to be adhered to across the District. This will include the key principles of development for locations identified for strategic development. Further detail relating to these schemes will then be included within subsequent 'Town-wide Plans' that will be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents.

It is expected that the Core Strategy Proposed Submission document will be prepared for consideration in spring 2009 (note: this would be dependent on the adoption of the South East Plan).

#### **4. What other evidence / documents will influence future decisions on the Core Strategy and development proposals at East Grinstead?**

##### Core Strategy Evidence Base (In general)

A wide range of information (evidence) is being gathered and interpreted to help inform the policies and development principles that will be set out with the District-wide Core Strategy. This includes the following:

- Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy
- District-wide transport study
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- Employment Study
- Infrastructure Audits
- Cross boundary work
- Appropriate Assessment (particularly important - see below)
- Rural Issues Background Paper

When published, all of the above will help to influence the development strategy for the district as a whole – this includes any proposals for development at East Grinstead.

##### Appropriate Assessment

The Council is now required to undertake an "Appropriate Assessment" as part of the Habitats Regulations. This is to assess the impacts of a land-use plan against the conservation objectives of any 'European Site' of biodiversity importance. The European ruling relating to carrying out a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of land use plans is fairly recent and guidance relating how this should be undertaken is new. (In October 2005, the European Court of Justice ruled that land-use plans should be subject to an "Appropriate Assessment" of their implications for European Sites. This ruling was communicated to Chief Planning Officers in a letter from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in March 2006).

The sites covered by this legislation are nature conservation areas designated as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). The Ashdown Forest in East Sussex is covered by these designations and Mid Sussex District Council now has to undertake an assessment to determine whether the plan would adversely affect the integrity of the site in terms of its nature conservation objectives. Where negative effects are identified other options should be examined to avoid any potential damaging effects.

A Screening Report was prepared in July 2007 indicating that there is a risk that development options in the Core Strategy will have significant impacts on the European nature conservation interests of the Ashdown Forest, primarily in relation to recreational disturbance and air pollution. A Scoping Report was then prepared in January 2008 to identify the scope and method of the Habitats Regulation Assessment. Further to this,

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the Council has commissioned consultants to gather important data and to progress a Habitats Regulations Assessment report to inform the Core Strategy submission document. An early indication is that the findings of the Assessment may have some significant implications for the level of development and associated infrastructure that would be acceptable (in terms of impact on the Ashdown Forest) in and around East Grinstead. In relation to proposals for strategic development, this is clearly an important element of work. It is expected that the final version of the Appropriate Assessment will be published by Spring 2009.

### South East Plan

The South East Plan (the Regional Spatial Strategy for the region) has been emerging over a number of years. Once the South East Plan (SEP) is adopted it will form a statutory document with which all Local Development Documents in the region will need to conform. For example, in Mid Sussex, the Core Strategy and the approach taken to housing delivery will need to be in conformity with this document and, as such, the drafts of the Core Strategy have reflected the appropriate stage of the emerging South East Plan.

In July 2008 the Government issued its proposed modifications to the South East Plan. At this stage, the Modifications represent the most relevant stage of the progression of the South East Plan.

The emerging South East Plan has recommended that all strategic development proposals identified in existing statutory plans, such as the West Sussex Structure Plan, should be specifically included in the South East Plan. The East Grinstead strategic proposal is referred to and the Plan also makes reference to the need for joint local authority working and multi-agency plans and frameworks to bring forward the required infrastructure. However, the wording relating to the East Grinstead development and associated infrastructure is somewhat confused within the proposed changes and it is strongly expected that this wording will be revised within the final version of the South East Plan, which is expected to be published in the first half of 2009.

The final wording may 'firm up' the link between the strategic development and the delivery of the relief road or, (perhaps more likely), it will allow for greater flexibility in how the district Council can consider the best strategy for delivering the required levels of development within the District as a whole.

#### **5. What further work would be required if an alternative approach to development at East Grinstead is to be progressed?**

- The District Council will work together with our key partners at the Town and County Councils, as well as stakeholder groups, neighbouring authorities and the developers to progress an alternative approach to development if one is required.
- Other key partners such as the Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS) will continue to help facilitate discussions to help ensure that the most suitable and deliverable scheme is progressed.
- The Council's 'evidence base' will be used, and in some cases developed further, to ensure that any alternative proposals that may be progressed deliver a sustainable development that offers the greatest benefits possible to new and existing residents in the town.

#### **6. The 'full' scheme included various infrastructure initiatives, ranging from schools to employment land and an integrated transport system. Could these now be abandoned if a reduced scheme is progressed?**

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- No. It is vital that any development permitted in Mid Sussex delivers the necessary infrastructure to, at least, meet the needs that arise from that development.
- The delivery of, or contributions towards, a wide range of infrastructure will be a requirement of any significant development proposals within the district. Any reduced scheme that could be progressed at East Grinstead would need to provide: schools; employment land; local shops; open space; recreational facilities etc. The level of provision of some elements may not be as great as the 'full' scheme but this would be set out within the Core Strategy with further detail then being provided within a subsequent 'Town Wide Plan'.
- Importantly, any alternative proposal (that may not include the 'full' relief road) will need to deliver significant improvements to the existing transport network (see question 7 below).

**7. In addition to what could be built at the strategic location it is estimated that a further 2,000 homes through other means could be built in and around the town in the period to 2026. Given current congestion problems how can this further growth be suitably accommodated without the delivery of a relief road?**

- It is vital that any alternative proposal (that may not include the 'full' relief road) delivers significant improvements to the existing transport network (public transport improvements; a possible new link road; junction improvements etc). This will help ensure that the present serious traffic problems in and around the town are addressed.

**8. To meet the housing requirements placed on the district through the South East Plan the Council will need to ensure that 17,000+ houses are delivered by 2026. If a reduced scheme is progressed at East Grinstead will the level of development allocated to Mid Sussex be reduced?**

- The Secretary of State's proposed changes to the South East Plan has increased the District Council's housing delivery target by 3,000 dwellings - from 14,100 in the draft South East Plan to 17,100 in the recently published Proposed Modifications. The Council has submitted an objection against this further increase, as significant concerns exist as to how such high levels of growth can be suitably delivered in a sustainable manner without impacting negatively on the environment and existing infrastructure provision.
- It will be a significant challenge to deliver the housing levels that will eventually be adopted the South East Plan. However, the Council's Core Strategy will consider the District as a whole in order to deliver a suitable strategy for the delivery of this housing in the most sustainable, acceptable and deliverable manner.
- Difficulties in delivering any of the identified strategic locations does not mean that the housing levels required through the South East Plan will simply 'go away'. Despite the current objection to the emerging housing figures for Mid Sussex the Council will, ultimately, have to adopt a strategy that will have the flexibility to deliver the district's housing requirement.

**9. What are the future major landmarks if revised proposals are to be progressed?**

- Publication and consideration, of the 'evidence base' that is being progressed to inform the Core Strategy (See question 4 above).
- Adoption of the South East Plan (See question 4 above).
- Work with key partners and stakeholders to give consideration to the housing delivery strategy to be included within the Council's Core Strategy. It is expected that the proposed Submission document will be prepared for consideration in spring 2009 (note: this would be dependent on the adoption of the South East Plan).