

EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT OPTIONS AND PREFERRED OPTIONS

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report deals with the Preferred Options stage of the Employment Development Plan Document, part of the Council's Local Development Framework. The draft 'Options and Preferred Options' document (Annex 1 to this report circulated to Cabinet members only) sets out the options considered and recommends the Council's preferred spatial strategy at this stage for meeting the needs of business and providing for economic development and employment in the district over the next 15 years, in the context of the Council's advisory Economic Strategy and having regard to the strategy of the adopted Local Plan.
2. The Preferred Options document follows on from work to compile an extensive evidence base of background information, which attempted to identify the future needs of business and the district's economy, and from stakeholder consultation on a range of identified issues and options.
3. Members are asked to approve the document for a statutory 6 week public consultation commencing on 27th October and ending on 8th December 2006. The Consultation documents will be accompanied by a response form which respondents will be requested to use.

CONTENT OF THE DOCUMENT

4. The Preferred Options document continues the format of the previous Issues and Options document published in May this year. Sections 1 & 2 set out the background to the Employment Development Plan Document including the following:
 - Consultations to date;
 - Objectives for the Employment Development Plan Document;
 - Relevant strategies, and national and regional policies;
 - The evidence base; and
 - Summary of issues identified.
5. Section 3 of the document looks at the options put forward in the previous Issues and Options document and puts forward recommended preferred options with reference to national and regional planning policies, relevant strategies, the evidence base, the response to the stakeholder consultation, and the results of sustainability appraisal of the various options and sites.
6. The document sets out options considered and recommends preferred options in six broad areas:
 - A – Retaining existing employment sites and allocations
 - B – Employment land allocations
 - C – Allocating sites for different types of employment
 - D – Conversion and redevelopment of buildings
 - E – Encouraging / diversifying agriculture
 - F – Encouraging flexible working and home working

MAIN ISSUES

7. Some issues addressed within the Preferred Options document, in particular those concerning proposed land allocations, need to be specifically drawn to Members' attention. These issues are addressed by looking at each of the 3 main economic sub-areas of the District (the document only deals with the parts of the District outside the National Park).

Totton & The Waterside

8. The responses to the earlier stakeholder consultation included some support from commercial interests for employment development in the area north of Totton, around junction 2 of the M27. Informal discussions with Members have identified some support for investigating the benefits of a high quality business park to accommodate knowledge-based industries and office uses if this could be done in a practical and sustainable way. It is recognised, however, that this area is separate from the built up area, that it would need a long access from the A36 Salisbury Road and that its development could lead to other development pressures within the large area of countryside between Totton and the motorway. Officers' advice, having had discussion with the County Council (who are the Highways Authority) and with the Highways Agency (who are responsible for the motorway) is that a small allocation for employment use adjacent to the motorway junction is unlikely to be practical in terms of access and by itself would be unsustainable. Such a proposal needs to be considered in the context of wider proposals for this whole area, possibly including recreational areas that could help take pressure off the New Forest, given the 80,000 additional houses proposed in the South Hampshire PUSH area. These wider issues go beyond the scope of this Employment Development Plan Document and so it is recommended that the future of this area be considered through the Core Strategy.
9. It is recommended that the future employment requirements of this sub-area (paragraph 3.39 in Annex 1) can be met by retaining existing allocations and new sites as set out at Table 2, page 27 of the Options and Proposed Options document at Annex 1. In quantitative terms this would more than provide for continued employment development in line with past rates of development.

Lymington & New Milton

10. While additional land would need to be allocated in this sub-area if past levels of employment development were to be maintained, it is very difficult to find acceptable sites given the national designations and access problems. Informal discussions with Members indicated that additional land could be considered in this sub-area at both Gordleton Pit, Lymington and east of Caird Avenue, New Milton. Members will be aware of the location and access issues at Gordleton which result in the site failing tests of sustainability and which have led to the site being rejected at three previous local plan inquiries and one appeal inquiry. The Council has recently commissioned local transport consultants to reappraise access and transportation relating to the site. The transport consultants have reviewed all relevant considerations and conclude that:
 - *Various independent Inspectors, over a long time period, have been consistent in concluding that further development at Gordleton Pit would not be acceptable on transportation grounds.*
 - *The local Highway Authority has consistently objected to further development.*
 - *No development has been permitted on other sites in the area that is at variance with those conclusions.*

- *There have been no improvements in the standard or character of the local rural road network or in the ability to access the site by bus, cycling or walking.*
- *Further mixed development, similar to that already permitted at Gordleton Pit, would generate significant new traffic flows. Office type development would be likely to generate higher levels of traffic.*
- *Improvements to the surrounding road network that have been considered in order to seek to accommodate further development would be likely to have a significant environmental impact, require third party land and be of high cost. The feasibility of such improvements is therefore highly questionable.*

Hence, there continue to be strong reasons on transportation grounds against further development at Gordleton Pit.”

11. Officers' advice, in the light of this reassessment of transport issues (and having regard also to national Green Belt policy) is that further land be not allocated at Gordleton Pit. Officers advise, however, that additional land can be identified at Caird Avenue to meet the future employment needs of this sub-area. This would satisfy land requirements in the Lymington / New Milton sub-area for continued employment development in line with past rates. See paragraph 3.40 in Annex 1.

Ringwood & Fordingbridge

12. Existing identified sites in Ringwood (including the Crow Lane reserve site) could provide for continued development at past rates without identifying new sites. However, there is a local view that recent rates of development have been constrained by lack of available sites and that the future provision should be for an increased rate of development. Ringwood Town Council has stated its preference for identifying land at Lynes Farm, adjoining the eastern edge of Ringwood south of the A31, for employment development, and considering re-allocation of some of the existing identified sites at Christchurch Road and Crow Lane. It is understood that there is some support for this position from local District Council Members. The land at Lynes Farm adjoins the A31. Previously this land was promoted as an employment site by this Council but was recommended against by the last Local Plan Inquiry Inspector primarily because of access considerations and because of its impact on an area of open countryside. There was an objection from the Highways Agency. Recent discussions with the Highways Agency have indicated that they may be prepared to reconsider their objection if a transport assessment could demonstrate that any adverse effects on the trunk road network could adequately be mitigated. Officers consider, having regard to local views, that some 5 hectares of land could be identified at Lynes Farm for employment allocation subject to a transport assessment being able to show that the requirements of the Highways Agency can be met. Subject to the land at Lynes Farm being allocated for employment use, the existing allocation of employment land at Christchurch Road could be revised to provide for mixed uses. (See paragraph 3.41 in Annex 1).
13. In Fordingbridge existing industrial sites to the west of the town bring traffic through the Town Centre resulting in significant environmental impact. Informal discussions with local Members have shown support for an allocation next to the A338 on land at Lower Burgate to the north of the town. Members will be aware that land in this area has been promoted by the Council and by a developer at two previous local plan inquiries. On both occasions these proposals have been recommended against by the Inspectors.

14. At the Local Plan Inquiry in 1997 the Inspector rejected the Council's proposed allocation at Burgate stating:

"I do not consider that the need [for additional employment land] is so great that land at Lower Burgate should be allocated for this purpose, particularly in the face of significant concerns relating to the impact of development on the character of the attractive hamlet of Lower Burgate, on the listed building of Burgate Farmhouse, on residential amenity, and on the character and quality of the attractive countryside west of Lower Burgate, much valued as part of the setting in Fordingbridge, by local residents and users of the Avon Valley Path."

15. Following the inquiry into the Local Plan First Alteration in 2003 the Inspector recommended against a smaller allocation pursued by Lascar Electronics at Burgate. He concluded that the proposals would be contrary to national guidance; would harm the rural character of Lower Burgate; and harm the special character of the Burgate Farmhouse Listed Building.
16. Officers have no evidence of specific current needs. However, the Employment DPD is looking 15 years ahead, there are no other suitable sites in the Fordingbridge area and there is a local view that more local employment land should be allocated. In view of these balanced considerations, a recommendation is sought from Economy & Planning Review Panel to Cabinet regarding this site. *(Note: Economy and Planning Panel recommended against this site, and drew attention to another site east of the A338 - see paragraph 20 below).*

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS / CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

17. Government legislation and advice in connection with the new planning system requires that all Local Development Documents, including Supplementary Planning Documents, are subject to Sustainability Appraisal, which will assess all relevant environmental, economic and social effects. This Council has established an agreed methodology for such an appraisal. A draft Sustainability Appraisal Report will be published with the Preferred Options document for consultation, and a copy is available in the Members Room.
18. It is important that the Employment Development Plan Document that is submitted for Public Examination meets the Government's "Test of Soundness" which are:

Procedural

- i. it has been prepared in accordance with the local development scheme;
- ii. it has been prepared in compliance with the statement of community involvement, or with the minimum requirements set out in the Regulations where no statement of community involvement exists;
- iii. the plan and its policies have been subjected to sustainability appraisal;

Conformity

- iv. it is a spatial plan which is consistent with national planning policy and in general conformity with the regional spatial strategy for the region or, in London, the spatial development strategy and it has properly had regard to any other relevant plans, policies and strategies relating to the area or to adjoining areas;
- v. it has had regard to the authority's community strategy;

Coherence, consistency and effectiveness

- vi. the strategies/policies/allocations in the plan are coherent and consistent within and between development plan documents prepared by the authority and by neighbouring authorities, where cross boundary issues are relevant;
- vii. the strategies/policies/allocations represent the most appropriate in all the circumstances, having considered the relevant alternatives, and they are founded on a robust and credible evidence base;
- viii. there are clear mechanisms for implementation and monitoring; and
- ix. the plan is reasonably flexible to enable it to deal with changing circumstances.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

19. Once approved, the Preferred Options will be published for public consultation. The financial costs involved in undertaking this round of consultation will be covered from existing budgets. In addition, if Members wish to progress with an allocation for employment of the Lynes Farm site and the land at Lower Burgate, further transport assessment work will be needed. Again this can at the moment be met from existing budgets but it will mean an increased risk that further budget provision may be needed in future years depending on the length of Public Examinations into Development Plan Documents.

COMMENTS FROM ECONOMY AND PLANNING REVIEW PANEL (MEETING ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2006)

20. In general, the Panel agreed that the sites and options included in the Preferred Options be not amended, but that the various concerns raised, as set out below, be passed on to Cabinet:-
- The Panel asked for an additional summarised version of the Consultation Document to make it more accessible to public.
 - Members felt that the Council should facilitate electronic responses to the Consultation Document, and this would be pursued.
 - The Panel agreed that an employment allocation should not be proposed for land at Lower Burgate.
 - The Panel suggested an additional site for consideration - land south of Stuckton Road, Fordingbridge. (To be included in Consultation Document, but not as a preferred option.) See map at Annex 2 (site 41a).
 - Eling Wharf - no change in principle but concerns raised over transport and other issues.
 - NATO site Hythe - retain, retain access by water, and rename.
 - Land north of Totton, Junction 2 - do not allocate land at this stage, but consider through core strategy.
 - Former chicken factory site, Bridge Road, Lymington - rename (from Webbs) and ensure any remaining employment parts of the site to be very high quality.
 - Totton - SHB site, 285-289 Salisbury Road - include in consultation as possible site to be released from employment use – see map at Annex 2 (site 45).

- Panel felt there should be a clear definition of what constitutes an acceptable building for rural conversion and what constitutes a live/work unit.
- In general, members made repeated comments about access and transport links in association with a number of sites, especially for HCV traffic, but it was accepted these were not easy problems to overcome.
- Members requested that detailed plans be made available in respect of the employment land available at the Fawley Refinery complex – see map at Annex 2 (site 25a).
- The Panel wished to express its disappointment that the National Park Authority chose not to do this work jointly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

21. It is RECOMMENDED that:

- Following consideration of the recommendations of Economy and Planning Review Panel, **Cabinet** approve for consultation the Employment Development Plan Document Preferred Options, excluding the possible employment allocation at Burgate.
- The Planning Policy Manager be authorised to make any necessary editorial changes to the document in preparing it for publication.

For Further Information Contact:

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Background Papers:

Employment Development Plan Document:
 Issues & Options Consultation (April 2006)
 Employment Background Papers

- EBP1 Employment Land Review Report 2005
- EBP2 Economic Profile of New Forest District 2006 (Hampshire County Council)
- EBP3 Analysis of employment development trends 2006
- EBP4 Employment Land – principal allocations in adjoining districts
- EBP5 Property Market Review – a commercial viewpoint 2006 (Vail Williams)
- EBP6 Citizen's Panel Survey 2004
- EBP7 Business Needs Survey Report 2005