

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
5 OCTOBER 2010**

**PLANNING POLICY UPDATE FOLLOWING THE REVOCATION OF REGIONAL
STRATEGIES**

Director of Environment, Culture and Communities

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report advises the Panel of recent changes to planning policies.

2 SUGGESTED ACTION

2.1 **The Panel notes the Government's advice on the immediate issues arising from the revocation of Regional Planning Strategies.**

3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Issues Arising from the Revocation of Regional Strategies

3.1 On 6 July 2010 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government announced the revocation of Regional Strategies with immediate effect. Attached to a letter informing Chief Planning Officers in England of this change was advice on the immediate issues arising from this change. This update report is based on that advice and is set out in the form of questions and answers. The implications for Bracknell Forest are in italics.

3.2 The final part of the paper covers the Government's announcement that council's should do more to reduce street clutter.

3.3 Do National Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) remain in force?

Yes. PPSs provide planning policies on a wide range of topics including Green Belts, Sustainable Economic Growth, Housing and Climate Change. The Policy Statement on Regional Strategies (February 2010) is cancelled, and references to Regional Strategies in other Policy Statements are no longer valid. However, all other PPSs will continue to apply until they are replaced by the National Planning Framework.

3.4 How will the change affect planning applications?

In determining planning applications local planning authorities must continue to have regard to the development plan. This will now consist only of:

- Adopted DPDs;
- Saved policies; and
- Any old style plans that have not lapsed.

Local planning authorities should also have regard to other material considerations, including national policy. Local planning authorities can also refer to evidence that was developed in support of the revoked Regional Strategies as a material

consideration if relevant. Where local planning authorities have not yet issued decisions on planning applications that have already been submitted, they can review those decisions in light of the new freedoms following the revocation of Regional Strategies. The revocation of the Regional Strategy may also be a material consideration.

3.5 Should we continue preparing LDF documents?

Yes. The revocation of Regional Strategies is not a signal for local authorities to stop making plans for their area. Local planning authorities should continue to develop LDF core strategies and other DPDs (such as the Site Allocations DPD), reflecting local people's aspirations and decisions on important issues such as climate change, housing and economic development.

These local plans will guide development in their areas and provide certainty for investors and communities. Local authorities may wish to review their plans following the revocation of Regional Strategies and the government recommends that where reviews are undertaken, these should be commenced as quickly as possible.

3.6 How does this affect adopted local plans / LDFs?

Adopted DPDs and saved policies will continue to provide the statutory planning framework. Local authorities may decide to review these now that Regional Strategies have been revoked. There is no need to review the whole LDF, only those issues or policies which local authorities wish to revisit.

For Bracknell we already have an adopted Core Strategy DPD and a set of saved policies. Our situation is unusual in that our Core Strategy contains housing numbers based on a draft version of the Regional Strategy that had a lower housing target than the final adopted version. This figure was justified based on the evidence available at that stage of the RSS preparation.

3.7 What if an LDF document is still being prepared?

Where local planning authorities are currently bringing forward development plan documents they should continue to do so. Authorities may decide to review and/or revise their emerging policies in the light of the revocation of Regional Strategies. Where authorities decide to do this they will need to ensure they meet the requirements for soundness under the current legislation. When undertaking consultation and sustainability appraisal on their draft policies, authorities should take an approach that considers the stage reached, the extent of work already undertaken and the scope of the policy changes they are making.

On the basis of this advice it would appear that the current advice is that we carry on with the Site Allocations Development Plan Document but have the option to revise the RSS housing target, provided this can be shown to be a sound approach. At this time, and based on other parts of the government advice, the Council is working on the assumption that the figure in the adopted Core Strategy is the housing target for Bracknell Forest.

3.8 Who will determine housing numbers in the absence of Regional Strategy targets?

Local planning authorities will be responsible for establishing the right level of local housing provision in their area, and identifying a long term supply of housing land

without the burden of regional housing targets. Some authorities may decide to retain their existing housing targets that were set out in the revoked Regional Strategies. Others may decide to review their housing targets. We would expect that those authorities should quickly signal their intention to undertake an early review so that communities and land owners know where they stand.

The implication of this is that, if we wish to change from the target set in the adopted Regional Strategy, we need to review the target and signal our intention to do so quickly. However, initial informal advice from GOSE is that we can use our adopted Core Strategy for this purpose, until and unless a review of this is undertaken.

3.9 Will we still need to justify the housing numbers in our plans?

Yes. It is important for the planning process to be transparent, and for people to be able to understand why decisions have been taken. Local authorities should continue to collect and use reliable information to justify their housing supply policies and defend them during the LDF examination process. They should do this in line with current policy in PPS3.

If we wish to adopt an alternative to the Core Strategy housing target, and/or when we start to plan for the period beyond 2026 the Council will need to establish a housing target based on a number of considerations including:

- *current and future levels of need and demand for housing*
- *the need to improve affordability and increase housing supply*
- *the availability of suitable land,*
- *the latest published household projections,*
- *economic growth forecasts,*
- *sustainability Appraisal, and*
- *existing and planned infrastructure and any new infrastructure requirements*

3.10 Can I replace Regional Strategy targets with the numbers agreed by local authorities for submission to the Regional Planning Board during the preparation of the South East Plan (the 'option 1' numbers)?

Yes, if that is the right thing to do for our area. Authorities may base revised housing targets on the level of provision submitted to the original Regional Spatial Strategy examination (Option 1 targets), supplemented by more recent information as appropriate. These figures are based on assessments undertaken by local authorities. However, any target selected may be tested during the examination process especially if challenged and authorities will need to be ready to defend them.

The option 1 number is very close to the figure in the adopted Core Strategy. The option 1 figure for Bracknell Forest was 10,780, the Core Strategy figure in Policy CS15 is 11,139 - the extra 359 units represent the carry over of a shortfall from the previous plan period. Subsequent advice from GOSE was that no allowance needs to be made for any previous shortfall. Removing the shortfall allowance would reduce our requirement by 2,000 from the adopted Regional Strategy target of 12,780 for the period from 2006 to 2026. Until and unless a review is undertaken, the Council will work on the 10,780 housing figure.

3.11 **Do we still have to provide a 5 year land supply?**

Yes. Although the overall ambition for housing growth may change, authorities should continue to identify enough viable land in their DPDs to meet that growth. Strategic Housing Market Assessments and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments can help with this. Local planning authorities should continue to use their plans to identify sufficient sites and broad areas for development to deliver their housing ambitions for at least 15 years from the date the plan is adopted. Authorities should also have a five year land supply of deliverable sites. This too will need to reflect any changes to the overall local housing ambition.

Bracknell Forest can currently show a housing land supply of:

*3.5 years against the revoked Regional Strategy target of 12,780, and
4.3 years against the 'option 1' target of 10,780*

Note - These are estimates based on the latest available completions data.

Even with the lower target we are unable to demonstrate a five year supply and it is therefore important that we continue to work on the Warfield SPD and Site Allocations DPD.

There has been an unavoidable delay to the SADPD programme resulting from the change in national and regional policy which means that the final SADPD may not now be adopted until 2012.

3.12 **10. How do we determine the level of provision for travellers' sites?**

Government has advised that Local councils are best placed to assess the needs of travellers. Local authorities will now be responsible for determining the right level of site provision, reflecting local need and historic demand, and for bringing forward land in DPDs. They should continue to do this in line with current policy. *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA)s* have been undertaken by all local authorities and if local authorities decide to review the levels of provision these assessments will form a good starting point. However, local authorities are not bound by them. The government has stated that it will review the relevant regulations and guidance in due course.

The Council does need to take account of the GTAA as the most recent evidence gathered on local need.

3.13 **Does the end of Regional Strategies mean changes to Green Belt?**

No. The Government is committed to the protection of the Green Belt and the revocation of Regional Strategies will prevent top-down pressure to reduce the Green Belt protection. Local planning authorities should continue to apply policies in PPS2. As part of their preparation or revision of DPDs, planning authorities are advised to consider the desirability of new Green Belt or adjustment of existing Green Belt boundaries, working with other local planning authorities as appropriate.

Bracknell Forest Council remains committed to the protection of the Green Belt and does not intend to review the Green Belt boundary in the Borough.

3.14 **What does the recent 'garden grabbing' announcement mean in practise?**

The government has also recently re-issued PPS3 (national planning guidance on housing). The changes include the removal of residential gardens from the definition of previously developed land.

Bracknell Forest Council will continue to judge each site on its merits and in accordance with its policies and guidance, including its recently adopted Character Area Assessments. To be clear, this change does not stop development of gardens within existing residential areas where it is considered acceptable to do so.

For the Site Allocations work, the priority order for identifying sites is set out in adopted Core Strategy Policy CS2 – Locational Principles. This establishes that we would firstly allocate land for development within Bracknell Town Centre, then using previously developed land and buildings in defined settlements and then other land within settlements where it would not conflict with other policies. The final priority in the sequence is extensions to defined settlements. This means that residential gardens would drop from the second level of the sequence to the third but that, providing there was no conflict with other policies, such sites would still be allocated in preference to urban extensions.

3.15 **What does the deletion of the indicative minimum density mean?**

The other change in the new PPS3 is the deletion of the national indicative minimum density of 30 homes per hectare.

The options consultation was carried out on the basis of site capacities arising from development densities of 35 and 40 units to the hectare so were in any event above the indicative minimum. There are a number of implications that arise if lower densities of development are adopted as the norm. These include lower ability to support public transport services, higher levels of car usage to access facilities and the need to allocate a greater area of land to accommodate a given number of homes. The government is still emphasising the need for sustainable development that minimises the need to travel, especially by car, and the need to use available land efficiently.

For Bracknell Forest our Core Strategy Policy CS1 also seeks the efficient use of land and buildings and locating development so as to reduce the need to travel, which would support higher densities. However, this is balanced by the need to protect and enhance the character and quality of local landscapes (Policy CS1) and respect local patterns of development (Policy CS7). Density level assumptions for the SADPD will be included in the preferred option for public consultation later this year.

Reducing Street Clutter

3.16 On 26th August 2010, councils were urged to get rid of unnecessary signs, railings and advertising hoardings in a bid to make streets tidier and less confusing for motorists and pedestrians.

3.17 Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles, and Transport Secretary, Philip Hammond, are concerned that the character of the country's urban spaces is being damaged and have written to councils' leaders calling on them to reduce the number of signs and other 'street clutter'.

- 3.18 The Government announcement identified a number of sources of guidance on how to achieve reductions and to some examples of best practice.
- 3.19 Government advice in Manual for Streets states that "the excessive or insensitive use of traffic signs and other street furniture has a negative impact on the success of the street as a place" and that "street signs are periodically audited with a view to identifying and removing unnecessary signs" (Manual for Streets, Department for Transport, 2007).
- 3.20 *For Bracknell Forest there is the opportunity to incorporate best practice advice in the forthcoming Streetscene SPD. A key aspect will be co-ordinating the approach to street signage in new development and combining signage and mounting signs on buildings as appropriate to reduce the number of individual posts.*
- 3.21 *A new edition of Manual for Streets is expected soon and will probably incorporate up to date advice on reducing clutter.*

Background Papers

None.

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