

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, HELD ON 11 APRIL 2002.

THE LEICESTERSHIRE, LEICESTER AND RUTLAND STRUCTURE PLAN - PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS

The Committee discussed various aspects of the report; the following comments and points were made:-

(i) Strategy

- It was important to take a strategic approach on planning issues; for example development in one area (perhaps outside the County) could impact on the potential for flooding in another region, some miles away. It was important to consider river corridors and flood plains. The Committee expressed concern that it had not in the past been possible to protect the environment from such consequences.
- The Committee was advised that whilst it was the responsibility of District Councils to take decisions on such planning applications it was considered that the Structure Plan was a valuable guidance document for the Local Plan framework and that the revised plan strengthened guidance to District Councils in that respect.
- It was considered that confusion might arise where District and Borough Councils were still preparing Local Plans either to conform to the existing Structure Plan. The proposed new document (which would not be finalised until Spring 2003) made significant changes to some policies. An example was given of the concept of a 'special landscape', a criterion which had been removed in the proposed new Structure Plan, but which had been a significant designation for local people opposing development in the current round of local plans. It was not clear whether those local plans still under preparation would take any account of the new Structure Plan.
- The Committee expressed concern that greenfield sites appeared to be an easier option for development than brownfield sites. The Acting Director explained that the sequential approach set out in Strategy Policy 3A was intended to counter this, and to steer development towards existing urban areas.
- Members noted the potential difficulty associated with defining terms such as 'overriding need' when planning applications were considered on appeal.
- The Committee noted a letter from Mrs. M.L. Sherwin CC endorsing a request from Burbage Parish Council and 'Burbage Matters' for a green wedge at Burbage. The Committee noted however that the new

Structure Plan provided for green wedges to be allocated by District Councils in association with new development. [A request that the issue of a green wedge at Burbage should be the subject of further report to the Committee was not supported]

(ii) Accessibility and Transport

- The Committee was pleased to see that the use of waterway corridors was being investigated and promoted for recreational and commercial use.
- The Committee did not support a suggestion put forward that the rail projects and infrastructure improvements (Panel Recommendation 7.72) should be included in the main text of the Structure Plan rather than the Explanatory Memorandum on the basis that to do so would be contrary to the advice given in 'PPG12 - Development Plans' that an authority should only include proposals in development plans that are firm and have a reasonable degree of certainty of proceeding within the Plan Period.

(iii) Housing

- The Committee commended officers for their work in achieving a considerable reduction to the housing allocation for the County from what had been proposed a few years previously. Whilst the current allocation was not ideal it was a great improvement.
- The Committee expressed concern that piecemeal housing development without associated infrastructure put a considerable strain on existing facilities such as education and leisure in the surrounding areas. The Acting Director advised members that Structure Plan guidance would provide the framework to enable District Councils to obtain developer contributions for appropriate infrastructure improvements.

RESOLVED:-

That the Proposed Modifications to the Structure Plan be endorsed.