

**EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
RURAL NORTH, OUNDLE & THRAPSTON DPD**

Note of Exploratory Meeting: Thursday 26th June 11.30 a.m.

Present:-

Chair

Mr John R Mattocks, Inspector for RNOTP examination

East Northamptonshire Council

Mr Robert Jameson, Solicitor

Mr Trevor Watson (Head of Planning Services)

Mrs Karen Horner (Planning Policy and Conservation Manager)

Mr Michael Burton (Senior Planning Policy Officer)

Mr Alan Richardson (Contract Planning Officer)

Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM)

Ms Fiona Forgham

Mr Steve Birkinshaw

East Midlands Regional Assembly (EMRA)

Mr Steve Bolton

North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit (the JPU)

Mr Andrew Longley

Mr Simon James

In opening the meeting, Mr Mattocks re-iterated that the purpose of the exploratory meeting was for him to seek clarification of the position of the Government Office for the East Midlands and, to some extent, the East Midlands Regional Assembly with regard to test of soundness (iv), whether the DPD is consistent with national and regional policy and other relevant plans and strategies and test (viii) the adequacy of mechanisms for implementation, especially in terms of the infrastructure for housing development. It is not the purpose of an exploratory meeting to test the evidence on these matters or to discuss the merits of the cases put forward in any representations. It is to assist the progression of the examination and to explore with the Council whether any additional information is required to properly inform the examination and, if so, the timetable for its production.

Mr Mattocks indicated that he had only that morning received a set of three "position statements" prepared by the Council in response to the agenda items which had been circulated in advance. He had not had time to fully assimilate the information contained within these documents and it was not appropriate at this meeting to go into such detail. These statements form part of the Council's evidence for the examination.

Item 1 – Housing land availability, compliance with PPS3.

Mr Mattocks had noted that the Council had supplied housing availability information only on a district-wide basis and not in relation specifically to the RNOTP area. He asked GOEM for their interpretation of PPS3 requirements and they confirmed that figures should be given for the plan area, rather than district figures. This will require additional work by the Council and the JPU offered to assist them in producing statistics for the plan area. Attention was drawn to the fact that paragraph 3.63 of the Joint Core Spatial Strategy requires the delivery of a five-year supply of housing at district-wide level.

GOEM commented that there was no housing trajectory and that there was no more than 2.5 years land availability. However, they were heartened by the figures put forward by the Council for the exploratory meeting and considered that in light of these figures it could be possible to meet PPS3's requirements.

The Council confirmed that it would be possible to dis-aggregate the figures and agreed to do this work by 18th July 2008. They asked the Inspector to bear in mind that land supply had not been calculated on the basis of PPS3.

Item 2 - Housing trajectory and implementation strategy

The Inspector reminded the Council that the key aspects of the new system are implementation and delivery and that the plan process aims to bring everything together to do this (see Para 62 of PPS3). Again, the Council had sought to rely on the JCSS and the district-wide information in the Annual Monitoring Report. This information will require dis-aggregation and revised information produced by 18th July.

Item 3 – Consistency with the adopted JCSS, especially in terms of infrastructure delivery.

The Inspector focussed primarily on the policies for Oundle, particularly the negative wording which reflected the submitted JCSS Policy 7, wording which had been deleted on recommendation of the Inspector who carried out the examination of the JCSS. Should the transport strategy preclude certain development sites then the plan might be regarded as premature.

The Council responded that the highways authority do not see the incomplete transport strategy as a necessity. It will allow a general overview through cumulative impact and will not put a bar on development. A more positive policy wording could be considered.

GOEM were satisfied that if the Council were able to overcome these concerns at examination, as seemed likely, then this would not amount to a "showstopper". If the survey is a strategic survey then it presents no fundamental problem to this LDD.

The Inspector canvassed the possibility that one option available to him would be to delete the Oundle section from the plan should he find it unsound. He asked the Council what the implications would be for the plan as a whole. The council responded that Oundle and Thrapston are the key service centres on which the plan relies. The removal of the Oundle section would leave too much of a gulf.

Item 4 – Other matters

The Inspector had identified in a cover note other matters which give rise to concern as to soundness but they did not appear to be of such a critical nature that they would render the whole plan unsound or require further action at present. The meeting agreed.

Outcome

The examination will continue on the timetable agreed at the earlier procedural meeting. However, the Inspector recognised that he would need to give other participants time to assimilate and comment upon the additional work he has requested that the Council complete by 18th July. He therefore set a later deadline for participants' statements of 26th August.