

Environment Planning and Countryside Committee

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Date: 26 October 2006.
Venue: National Assembly for Wales, Colwyn Bay
Title: Local Development Plans - Conwy County Borough Council

The Preparation and Progress Of The Conwy LDP

1. LDP Task and Finish Group

- 1.1 An internal Member Group of the Council set up to oversee progress on the LDP. Membership of the Group comprises one half of the Planning Committee (responsible for Development Control) and an equivalent number of Members from the Environment Scrutiny Committee (responsible for Planning Policy). The total number of Members on the Panel is 32. The Panel is a sub-committee of the Environment Scrutiny Committee but does have decision-making capability.
- 1.2 The Group first met in February 2005 and has met on ten occasions altogether. The first few meetings of the Group considered the various consultation documents received from the Welsh Assembly and focused on matters of information gathering. This year, the Group has concentrated on development of the LDP Strategy. The Group last met on 28th June 2006 and approved the Conwy LDP Strategy for public consultation.
- 1.3 Several members of the Council/Group took advantage of the training opportunity provided by the WLGA in November 2005 and the follow-up training provided in-house by the Planning Department.

2. The Town and Community Councils

- 2.1 Invitations were extended to all the Town and Community Council in the LDP Plan Area in April 2005 to discuss the new development plan framework with Council Planning Officers and, during the three month period May to July 2005, Planning Officers attended meetings with some twenty Town and Community Councils out of a possible total of twenty-eight.
- 2.2 The top four issues raised by the Town and Community Councils were:
 - Lack of affordable housing
 - Provision of local needs housing (affordable and market housing)
 - Ability of local infrastructure to cope with further development
 - Decline in rural employment opportunities
- 2.3 Concern was also expressed by several Councils at the proposal to make the Inspector's report of the Examination in Public binding on the local planning authority.

3. LDP Focus Groups

- 3.1 This was an event held in Llandudno in July 2005 to which 150 individuals and organisations with an interest in development plan making were invited to discuss relevant issues.

3.2 The main issues arising from the discussion were as follows:

- The location of new development
- Lack of affordable housing
- Investment in local Infrastructure
- Future economic prosperity
- Conserving environmental quality

4. The LDP Advisory Panel

4.1 An external Stakeholder Group set up to advise the Council on matters of LDP preparation and content, comprising various business, community and environmental interests. The membership of LDP Advisory Panel is as follows:

Chairman of Conwy LDP Task and Finish Group
 Clerk of Bay of Colwyn Town Council
 Clerk of Llanfairtalhaiarn Community Council
 Clerk of Towyn and Kinmel Bay Town Council

together with representatives of:

Cadw
 Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales
 Conwy Local Strategic Partnership
 Conwy Valley Civic Society
 Countryside Council for Wales
 Department of Enterprise, Innovation and Networks
 Environment Agency
 Home Builders Federation (formerly the House Builders Federation)
 Llandudno Hospitality Association (an organisation representing the local tourism industry)
 North Wales Police
 Watkin Jones Homes Ltd.

Total 15 members

4.2 The Advisory Panel first met in September 2005 and has met on five occasions. The Panel last met on 21st June 2006 and approved the Conwy LDP Strategy for public consultation.

4.3 Membership of the Panel is currently under review, as a result of poor attendance by some organisations, and suggestions (i) to increase the number of Community Council representatives and (ii) to include the main infrastructure providers.

5. The LDP Preferred Strategy

5.1 The process of approval within Conwy includes:

| | | |
|--------------------------------|----------|------------|
| LDP Advisory Panel | 17/03/06 | (achieved) |
| Conservation Advisory Panel | 05/04/06 | (achieved) |
| LDP Advisory Panel | 21/06/06 | (achieved) |
| LDP Task and Finish Group | 28/06/06 | (achieved) |
| Environment Scrutiny Committee | 20/07/06 | |
| Senior Executive Team | 01/08/06 | |
| Cabinet | 10/08/06 | |

with public consultation following in October/November 2006.

6. The Delivery Agreement

6.1 The Delivery Agreement was formally submitted to the Welsh Assembly in August 2005 and approved by the Assembly in September 2005. The Agreement allows for slippage of up to six months in the programme of events

6.2 The timetable contained within the Agreement outlined the following succession of events:

| Event | Date |
|--|-------------|
| • Council resolve to cease work on the UDP and instead to prepare an LDP | 09/04 |
| • Council resolve to set up LDP Task and Finish Group | 11/04 |
| • Consultation on Draft Delivery Agreement | 02/05 |
| • First meeting of LDP Task and Finish Group | 02/05 |
| • LDP Focus Group Event | 07/05 |
| • Formal Submission of Delivery Agreement to Welsh Assembly | 08/05 |
| • Welsh Assembly approve Delivery Agreement | 09/05 |
| • First meeting of LDP Advisory Panel | 09/05 |
| • Consultants produce SA/SEA Scoping Report | 09/05 |
| • Consultation on the Scoping Report | 09/05 |
| • Consultants produce SA of the LDP Preferred Strategy | 01/06* |
| • Council approve LDP Preferred Strategy | 01/06* |
| • Public Consultation on LDP Preferred Strategy | 04/06* |

* indicates dates not achieved

6.3 In October 2005, during a discussion on future growth and its distribution within the County Borough, Members of the LDP Task and Finish Group indicated that they wished to receive detailed information relating to 600 sites on the Planning Department's Urban Land Database. This caused a diversion of staff resources such that the Preferred Strategy was not ready to present to Members in January 2006, neither was the Strategy ready to send to the Consultants undertaking the Sustainability Appraisal of the LDP. The delay amounted to three months.

6.4 In March 2006, shortly before the LDP Task and Finish Group was due to consider the LDP Preferred Strategy, the meeting of the Task and Finish Group was cancelled principally to allow consideration of the Consultant's draft report on Sustainability Appraisal and enable appropriate responses. Then, in April, the Council was advised by the Assembly to screen the Preferred Strategy for potentially significant effects affecting Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas (Sites of European importance falling within the ambit of the EU Habitats Directive). These matters caused a further delay of three months.

7. The Revised Timetable

7.1 The delays have led to a review of the LDP timetable through to adoption, as follows:

| Event | Dates | |
|--|--------------|------------|
| | Old | New |
| • Consultants produce SA of the LDP Preferred Strategy | 01/06 | 07/06* |
| • Council approve LDP Preferred Strategy | 01/06 | 08/06 |
| • Public Consultation on LDP Preferred Strategy | 04/06 | 10/06 |
| • Council approve Deposit LDP | 02/07 | 09/07 |
| • Public Consultation on Deposit LDP | 04/07 | 01/08 |

- Examination in Public 04/08 01/09
- LDP adopted 02/09 09/09

* draft report received 03/06.

8. Current Issues

8.1 The following matters are considered to be the principal matters affecting the preparation and progress of the Conwy LDP at the present time:

- Recruitment
- Wales Spatial Plan
- The capacity of and future investment in infrastructure
- Lack of affordable housing

8.2 **Recruitment**

The Development Plans and Policy Section has an approved establishment of six staff and has significant other responsibilities in addition to preparing the Local Development Plan. Currently there are four staff in post but one of these is on loan to Development Control full-time. The member of staff on loan should be back working full-time in Development Plans and Policy within three months. The newly created sandwich student post has been filled but the student in question is not due to take up position until August. Interviews are being held for the post of Planning Assistant in the Section on 7/10th July.

8.3 Attempts to fill various posts in the Development Plans and Policy Section in the last 18 months have often led to readvertisement with few applications being received and withdrawal by candidates shortlisted for interview. Shortlisted candidates have withdrawn either as a result of being offered a job elsewhere or better terms by their existing employer.

8.4 **Wales Spatial Plan**

Conwy is divided between three Spatial Plan sub areas and working groups have been set up in each, coordinated by the Welsh Assembly, to advance the work already undertaken on the Spatial Plan. Two of the working groups, North West Wales and North East Wales have commissioned further studies. The situation is causing some uncertainty because the results of both studies may impact upon the LDP Preferred Strategy. Because of differing timescales there is concern that Conwy may have to amend and re-consult on its Preferred Strategy at a later date (an eventuality not provided for in the Delivery Agreement or the revised timetable above).

8.5 **The capacity of and future investment in infrastructure**

Infrastructure in this context is taken to mean not only the traditional power, water supply and sewerage services but also certain key public services such as education and health. Members of Conwy Council and the Community Councils are increasingly concerned at the ability of local schools to accept more pupils and of local GP services to cope with additional patients where further significant development is proposed. There are also concerns about water supply and sewerage provision in certain areas. Welsh Water is known to have serious concerns over the ability of the sewerage network in Colwyn Bay, Llandudno and Llandudno Junction to accept further discharges. These areas are within or on the edge of the strategic hub identified in the Wales Spatial Plan.

8.6 The Development Plan system has always tried to look ten or fifteen years ahead, and it is the view of Planning Officers generally that this is sufficient time to enable infrastructure providers to plan for and provide additional capacity. However, some infrastructure

providers are seeking to defer future development on the grounds of insufficient resources (manpower or money) to deal with current problems.

8.7 ***Lack of affordable housing***

This is a matter well understood by all parties and everyone is expecting great things from the planning system but are they expecting the unattainable?

8.8 Local planning authorities are required to set overall affordable housing targets in LDPs in terms of numbers. The emerging LDP Strategy proposes the completion of 4730 new dwellings (including conversions) over a fifteen year period. The new Technical Advice Note on Planning and Affordable Housing (TAN 2) enables the use of the thresholds and targets. The Conwy Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) proposes thresholds of 10 dwellings in urban areas and 3 dwellings in rural areas, and an average target of 30% affordable housing provision on developments of this size and greater.

8.9 Given that two-thirds of all housing development in Conwy is below threshold size, then the predicted amount of affordable housing generated is approximately 10%, an average of 31 dwellings per year out of an average annual build of 315 dwellings, or 473 dwellings out of a total of 4,730 dwellings over the period of the LDP. The annual average of 31 compares poorly with the requirement for 200 affordable dwellings per year identified in the 2002/3 Conwy Housing Needs Study.

8.10 During the preparation of the SPG, our Valuation Officer advised that to seek higher levels of affordable housing i.e. above 30% would render some housing developments uneconomic.

8.11 The new TAN 2 enables local planning authorities to identify sites wholly for affordable housing and the estimate of 473 quoted above may be considered an underestimate. However, TAN 2 states quite clearly at the end of paragraph 10.9:

“Such sites are likely to be small in number in relation to the total number of sites available in a local planning authority area and small in scale.”

8.12 The affordable housing target in the Conwy LDP may therefore be higher than the figure of 473 quoted above but not high enough to satisfy the expectations of Assembly Members, Council Members and local residents. A Regional Local Housing Assessment is being planned for later in the year and this will be used to inform the Deposit LDP.

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