

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK CORE STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC POLICIES

TOPIC PAPER 8
ENVIRONMENT



CONSULTATION April – May 2005

Department of Planning and Environmental Services
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HAMBLETON
DISTRICT COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

This Topic Paper, Topic Paper 8 raises issues and options on the Environment for the Core Strategy of the Hambleton Local Development Framework. It takes as its reference point the possible Spatial Strategy for the Hambleton Local Development Framework set out in Topic Paper 3, The Spatial Strategy.

The Topic Paper is split up into the following sections:

- Influences
- Evidence Base
- Key Issues & Options
- Questions
- Responses

Community involvement in this and all the other Topic Papers is fundamental to preparing the Local Development Framework. Once you have read the Topic Paper, we would encourage you to give us your ideas about the options for the Strategic Environment Policies in Hambleton by answering the questions at the end of the paper. Your ideas and any other comments you make will be considered in moving on to the next stage in the preparation of the Core Strategy for the Hambleton Local Development Framework.

INFLUENCES

When preparing the Local Development Framework, the Council does not start with a blank sheet of paper. There is a whole series of planning policies at national level which have to be followed and at regional level too. Similarly, the themes of the Hambleton Community Plan and the Local Agenda 21 Strategy have to be considered. And of course service providers like the Primary Care and Hospital Trusts, utility companies and other key stakeholders have significant contributions to make as well.

Key National Government Policies are given in **Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development** which sets out the Government's vision for planning and the key policies and principles for the planning system:

- Sustainable development
- Spatial planning
- Community involvement

A fundamental aspect of sustainable communities and living is having a high quality physical environment.

Planning Policy Statement 12 and its Companion Guide spell out Government policy and guidance on Local Development Frameworks. In addition, there are other Government documents which need to be taken into account in looking at the environmental aspects of Local Development Frameworks, including the **Urban and Rural White Papers** and **Planning Policy Guidance Note 3** on Housing. These three documents emphasise the importance of promoting good design to create high quality environments in which people will choose to live. Local distinctiveness and high quality new development are also emphasised by the Government and its Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE).

Nature conservation forms the subject of **Planning Policy Guidance Note 9** which contains extensive references and guidance about bio-diversity and the natural environment.

The importance of the historic heritage and of archaeology is recognised in **Planning Policy Guidance Notes 15 and 16** respectively.

Attractive open spaces are key elements in townscapes and **Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation and 3: Housing**, both encourage the provision of new open spaces and the improvement of existing ones, some of which can of course, provide valuable wildlife habitats.

Planning Policy Statement 22: Renewable Energy encourages planning authorities and developers to promote the use of renewable energy.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 25:

Development and Flood Risk sets out the Government's policy to reduce the risks to people and the natural and built environment due to flooding. It acknowledges that river flooding problems are getting worse in frequency and scale and, in relation to the production of Local Development Frameworks, advises that:

- Flood risk be properly taken into account in the planning and design of developments to reduce the risk of flooding and the damage which floods cause;
- In looking for potential development sites a risk-based sequential test should be followed giving priority to areas of lower risk;
- The use of sustainable drainage systems to control run-off from new development be encouraged;
- Flood resistant construction techniques be used where appropriate.

Finally, other Government Planning Policy Guidance Notes deal with such matters as noise, minerals and waste.

A new **Regional Spatial Strategy** is currently being prepared by the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Assembly and the Hambleton Local Development Framework must comply generally with it. The existing Regional Spatial Strategy (which was previously called Regional Planning Guidance) is fully consistent with the vision of the Government for sustainable development. In other words, it looks for economic regeneration and growth; social inclusion; urban and rural renaissance; and conservation and enhancement of natural resources. More specifically, urban and rural renaissance is to be encouraged by:

- steering resources towards making existing settlements better places to live, work and invest;
- creating high quality sustainable places through greater attention to design;
- ensuring that crime prevention considerations are incorporated into the design and development;
- enhancing the landscape and appearance of open spaces and the settings of new developments; and

- defining and promoting locally distinctive designs whilst encouraging good quality, innovative, new design.

In addition, natural resources should be conserved and/or enhanced by:

- reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- repairing and re-using existing buildings in preference to allocating land for new development;
- encouraging new buildings to be built to "lifetime" standards;
- promoting energy efficient designs and layout of development;
- making best use of materials which are more energy efficient and less damaging ecologically; and
- minimising the impacts of travel by integrating land use and transport.

Wind energy proposals could have a significant impact within the District as it is recognised in the Regional Spatial Strategy Topic Paper 7 on Energy as having one of the highest potentials for such development in the region.

The Government is committed to increasing the use of renewable energy in its attempt to counteract climate change. In Hambleton this could include biomass heating, wind turbines and solar panels. It is also important to consider energy related issues which fall outside traditional land use planning, but nevertheless have a spatial dimension. These include reducing the need for travel, increasing energy efficiency, identifying areas for new energy technology and adequate energy storage and distribution facilities.

A **Regional Sustainable Development Framework** has also been adopted for Yorkshire and the Humber. It emphasises the widespread concern about climate change and its threat to the earth's environment and its people. The Regional

Sustainable Development Framework identifies a number of aims to address the issues arising from climate change. The Local Development Framework can help to minimise climate change by encouraging sustainable transport, energy-efficient buildings, promoting renewable energy sources and encouraging tree and woodland planting and conservation.

In preparing the new Regional Spatial Strategy, the Regional Assembly has published a series of Topic Papers looking at the different aspects of life in the Region and explaining the techniques and methods it has used in producing the Regional Spatial Strategy. The Regional Assembly's Topic Papers look at various environmental issues, such as bio-diversity, energy, minerals and waste management and water. And, of course, there are many environmental matters associated with transport which are dealt with at length in their Topic Papers 5(a) to 5(f). For example, reducing traffic pollution and congestion will have major benefits in terms of better air quality, less noise and other environmental improvements.

The **Hambleton Community Plan** is a broad strategic document which sets out a vision and action plan for the future well being of the District and is prepared by the Hambleton Local Strategic Partnership of over 40 public and private organisations and community groups. Its vision for Hambleton is "A Hambleton of sustainable, safe, healthy and prosperous communities where people participate in decisions that affect them, which is welcoming, values diversity and supports the disadvantaged."

One of the key themes of the Community Plan is to create a sustainable community that minimises its impact on the environment and seeks to protect and enhance the historic heritage, landscape and bio-diversity of the District. This theme is then developed through a number of key environmental issues:

- conserving the natural and historic heritage
- working towards sustainable development
- monitoring and improving air quality
- reducing the production of waste

Hambleton Council's New Vision only recently adopted is intended to provide a focus for all-"An excellent Council making life better - improving the quality of life for all, providing high quality services to our communities and helping to deliver community needs". A high quality environment will, undoubtedly, be a key factor in improving the quality of life for all.

Finally, the **Key Issues Report** has been drawn on heavily by Hambleton Council in looking at the environment from the point of view of the Local Development Framework. The environmental assets of the District are identified as;

- The Howardian Hills and the Nidderdale Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB);
- The open countryside, its landscape and best and most versatile agricultural land;
- The York Green Belt;
- Areas of wildlife and ecological value - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC);
- The character of settlements and their immediate environments;
- Air and water supplies;
- Buildings and areas of townscape, historic and architectural merit - Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas;
- Sites of archaeological importance - Scheduled Monuments, sites shown on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR);
- Land of recreational and amenity value; and
- The public rights of way network.

EVIDENCE BASE

The collection of environmental information is an on-going task for many agencies both public and private. In the Council's case, for example, monitoring air quality is part of the Environmental Service provided for the District. Similarly, implementation of the Bio-diversity Action Plan includes not only actions to improve habitats and protect plant and animal species, but also to monitor how the environment is changing. The County Council, for its part, monitors the transport system and in doing so, monitors a key influence on the environment as a whole.

KEY ISSUES AND OPTIONS

The Key Issues Report of 2003, which includes a section on the environment, was the subject of an extensive consultation programme by the Council during which the views of Council Members, public and private organisations, community groups and individuals were sought. The options draw on this earlier work and the influences and evidence base outlined above.

In progressing the Local Development Framework, Hambleton Council has continued to look at the environment from the point of view of Planning Authority and has taken on board the various policies at national, regional and local level, which affect the environment. However, since the Key Issues Report in particular was consulted upon in 2003, there may well be different ideas about the environment within the District.

Conservation and Design

The quality of people's environment can be improved immensely by ensuring that new development is well designed. This is particularly important in areas of historic importance where poorly designed new development is even more undesirable. The Council has long recognised that conservation led regeneration can bring significant economic and social benefits to the market towns in the District, and has operated a number of targeted grant aid schemes on the market towns. A large number of buildings have since been repaired and new uses have been attracted into the town centres. Major environmental enhancement schemes have been undertaken in Northallerton and Thirsk; the cobbled Market Place at Bedale and in Stokesley's Market Place and College Square. Elsewhere in the District, specific grant budgets are available for the repair of historic buildings.

Question 1. How can the Local Development Framework preserve and enhance existing Conservation Areas in the District?

Question 2. What can the Local Development Framework do to improve the quality of design in new buildings?

Question 3. Should high quality design be promoted everywhere and in all developments?

Public Art

There are also opportunities for promoting public art when designing and building new developments. The Local Development Framework can recognise this through, for example, a 'percentage for art' policy (an extra charge on development proposals with the specific objective of providing public art).

Question 4. Should the Local Development Framework help encourage public art within the design of new developments?

Energy

Sustainable building is another way to improve the environment of Hambleton. This means using materials and designs which are long-life, low maintenance, energy efficient, flexible to meet changing needs and ideally using locally produced and renewable materials. A well designed landscape scheme adds immensely to any development and benefits the wider landscape.

The Regional Spatial Strategy Topic Paper 7 entitled 'Energy' raises the issue of local targets and questions what level these should be set at. There are 3 options:

- Set the regional targets to 2010 and 2020 and sub-regional targets to 2010 in line with existing policy (but not set any Local Authority targets)
- Set regional targets to 2010 and 2020 and sub-regional targets to 2010 in line with existing policy, and set sub-regional targets to 2020 and Local Authority targets to 2010 and 2020 in line with the Sub-Regional Renewable Energy Assessment and Targets Study Findings
- Set another variable (and if so, what?)

Question 5. How could the Local Development Framework encourage energy efficiency and sustainable construction in new developments?

Question 6 (a). How can the Local Development Framework encourage the development of renewable energy sources? E.g. wind turbines and solar power?

Question 6 (b). What priority should be given to protecting the landscape?

Transport

The Local Development Framework will also need to look at sustainable transport options in relation to the environment. Options relating to these issues are outlined in Topic Paper 7: Transport and Accessibility.

Secured By Design

Open spaces are green lungs in settlements and can be used for children's play, walking and sport, as well as having general amenity value. They can also be valuable habitats for wildlife. However, fear of crime is an important issue and care must be taken with the design and layout of new developments by following the 'Secured by Design' guidance. Good design can allow public spaces to be overlooked by neighbours and potential escape routes can be eliminated. Designing out crime is possible in all public areas, including housing estates, town centres and industrial areas.

Question 7 (a). How can the Local Development Framework encourage Secured by Design development?

Question 7 (b). Should this apply to all kinds of development?

Natural Environment

Much of Hambleton is used for intensive agriculture, occupying significant parts of the Vales of York and Mowbray. Intensive agriculture has resulted in widespread removal of hedgerows and trees, often assisted by Government grants. The percentage of the District covered by trees and woodland is very low and the Hambleton Bio-diversity Action Plan encourages efforts to provide and improve a variety of locally important landscape areas. In this way, the Plan also encourages a greater variety of plant, animal and bird species.

Question 8. What can the Local Development Framework do to improve the design and landscaping of open spaces?

Question 9. How can the natural environment of the countryside be enhanced through individual developments?

Question 10. What can the Local Development Framework do to improve the natural environment, including bio-diversity of the District?

Flooding

Flood risk is an increasingly important issue and it will be essential to take this into account in preparing Hambleton's Local Development Framework in order to manage and reduce the occurrence of flooding in the District, and ensure that new development does not pose an unacceptable risk of flooding on the development sites themselves or increase the risk of flooding elsewhere.

The Government advises that in seeking sites to allocate for development in Local Development Frameworks priority should be given to those areas that have no risk or a low risk of flooding, and that once options for potential allocation sites have been identified a flood risk assessment of each site should be undertaken before they are formally proposed for inclusion in the Local Development Framework.

Question 11. What would be the best way of protecting existing settlements and new developments from flooding?

- (i) Only allowing development to take place in the lowest risk settlements, i.e. those which are free from flooding problems.
- (ii) Allowing development in settlements with flooding issues, but only on low risk sites, i.e. where a flood risk assessment has shown development will not cause flooding problems.
- (iii) Allowing development on high risk sites (i.e. in settlements with flooding issues on sites where under normal circumstances development would pose a risk of flooding) if appropriate measures are taken to remove the risk.

The Council is very interested to know what Hambleton's many communities and stakeholders feel about the environment of the District for the period up to 2021. Bearing in mind the many influences which Hambleton Council has had to take into account in producing the Local Development Framework, we should be pleased if you would answer the questions on the following pages.

QUESTIONS

Question 1.

How can the Local Development Framework preserve and enhance existing Conservation Areas in the District?

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Question 2.

What can the Local Development Framework do to improve the quality of design in new buildings?

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Question 3.

Should high quality design be promoted everywhere and in all developments?

Yes No

Question 4.

Should the Local Development Framework help encourage public art within the design of new developments?

Yes No

Question 5.

How could the Local Development Framework encourage energy efficiency and sustainable construction in new developments?

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Question 6 (a).

How can the Local Development Framework encourage the development of renewable energy sources E.g. wind turbines and solar power?

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Question 6 (b).

What priority should be given to protecting the landscape?

High Medium Low

Question 7 (a).

How can the Local Development Framework encourage Secured by Design development?

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Question 7 (b).

Should this apply to all kinds of development?

Yes No

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Any Other Comments?

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RESPONSES

Thank you for reading this Topic Paper. What you say really can influence the Hambleton Local Development Framework. Please let us know what you think about the Spatial Vision by completing and returning the questions pages in the pre-paid envelope or by Email to planning.policy@hambleton.gov.uk by Friday 20th May 2005.

All responses will be recorded and then considered by the District Council in moving on to the next stage of preparing the Core Strategy and Strategic Policies Development Plan Document.