

Strategic Development Plan for South East Scotland (No. 2): Main Issues Report

Report by Ian Johnson, Head of Communities and Economy

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1** This report informs Council of the preparation of the Main Issues Report of the Strategic Development Plan for Edinburgh and South East Scotland: and seeks the Council's approval of the Report for publication and public consultation.

2.0 Background

- 2.1** Midlothian Council is a member of the Strategic Development Planning Authority for Edinburgh and South East Scotland. The Authority is a statutory body comprising the six Councils of South East Scotland (City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Fife, Scottish Borders, and West Lothian being the other member Councils) and is charged with the responsibility of preparing a strategic development plan at no greater than five yearly intervals. The strategic development plan primarily requires to set out a coherent approach to land use planning and transport over a twenty year period.
- 2.2** Following the required approval of Scottish Ministers, the first Strategic Development Plan for South East Scotland was published in 2013. It provides a strategic planning context for the region to 2032, and comprises the overall strategic planning framework for the preparation of local development plans by individual Councils, including this Council's Midlothian Local Development Plan.
- 2.3** The Strategic Development Planning Authority has now embarked on preparation for the next Strategic Development Plan with a target date for completion and Scottish Ministers' approval in 2017. The first stage of that statutory preparation process is the publication of a Main Issues Report. On 29 May 2015 the Strategic Development Plan Joint Committee, comprising two Councillors from each of the six Member Councils, approved the Main Issues Report for publication and public consultation, subject to ratification by each of the six constituent Councils. If that ratification process can be completed in June, then the formal public consultation period will run for a period of eight weeks from 21 July to 15 September 2015.

- 2.4** Copies of the Main Issues Report have been placed in the Members' Library, together with the required accompanying documents which comprise the Monitoring Statement, the Interim Environmental Report, and the Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment. At the time of formal publication there will also be a number of background technical notes on specific matters.

3.0 Summary of the Major Provisions of the Main Issues Report

- 3.1** It is relevant to be aware that a Main Issues Report does not define policy, nor does it identify or allocate sites for development or other use. Its purpose is to set out the issues of strategic significance for the Region and to seek the views of a wide range of interested stakeholders and the public. Only once the evidence has been gained, can the Strategic Planning Authority define its proposed strategy and policy in its Proposed Plan. However, the governing planning legislation requires the Authority to identify in its Main Issues Report a preferred strategy together with reasonable alternative(s), so as to provide readers of the Report with an indication of the initial views of the Authority.
- 3.2** As the beginning of the Main Issues Report (MIR) the Authority sets out its overall vision for Edinburgh and South East Scotland as follows:

“The South East Scotland region is a thriving, successful and sustainable area in which all forms of deprivation and inequality are reduced and the region is internationally recognised as an outstanding area to live, work and do business. We will build on the strengths of all parts of the region and identify opportunities for growth and development while conserving and enhancing the natural and built environment.”

- 3.3** The MIR is structured in sections that cover ‘A Place to do Business’, ‘A Place for Communities’, ‘A Better Connected Plan’, and ‘Delivering the Vision and the Strategy.’ For each of these the MIR sets out the challenges and notes any particular constraints. The MIR recognises the need for the Region to grow through further development and proposes **an overall strategy** of directing such development into “**growth corridors**” radiating out from Edinburgh. More specifically, development is focussed on the City with additional growth located close to the Edinburgh urban area along corridors with good public transport access: the primary focus of such development being to the west and south east of Edinburgh, some of this probably requiring loss of some green belt land. However, the MIR also highlights constraining factors for particular areas: noting in the case of Midlothian that whilst much of the area lies within the 60 minute public transport travel time to Edinburgh, the area also has extensive amounts of land already identified for development such that any additional growth around settlements would need careful assessment against the principles of development as set out in the MIR, including environmental considerations and the capacity of settlements to accommodate further development in terms of layout and urban form.

- 3.4** Under **A Place to do Business** the overall approach is to identify strategic opportunities for investment, improve connectivity, deliver information and promote sustainable places in the development of an increasingly low carbon economy. The MIR provides strategic alignment with local economic development strategies, including this Council's 'Ambitious Midlothian'. It also identifies strategically significant business clusters, including Shawfair and the Bush, with a preferred option to support and expand these clusters. In relation to renewable energy the MIR notes that the most suitable and least harmful environmental and landscape onshore windfarm areas have been developed: such that whilst there may be further capacity, this will be limited by landscape and community sensitivities. With regard to minerals and coal extraction the MIR requires local development plans to identify specific areas of search. In relation to waste the MIR requires local development plans to safeguard locations/facilities that contribute to meeting Zero Waste Plan targets.
- 3.5** Under **"A Place for Communities"** the overall approach is a co-ordinated and comprehensive promotion of a high quality built and natural environment with a good supply of housing to meet need, access to healthy town centres, and well managed greenspace. In respect of housing the MIR is required to use its housing needs and demand assessment to prepare the 'housing supply target' and the 'housing land requirements'. Those projections are based on an assumption of a scenario of 'steady economic growth'. The primary issue is that the City of Edinburgh will not be able to accommodate fully the demand for housing within its boundaries, such that a minority of that demand will need to be met outwith the City in accordance with the Plan's preferred spatial strategy. This does not necessarily mean that any of that development would be directed to Midlothian where, as the MIR identifies, the existing housing land supply is already more than adequate to meet need and demand in Midlothian, and where opportunities to accommodate further housing development beyond that commitment could present serious environmental and infrastructure difficulties. The housing research undertaken in preparation of the MIR shows that in the period to 2029, 52% of the total need and demand is estimated to be for social housing, with a further 12% for below market rent accommodation.
- 3.6** The MIR reinforces the preferred strategy of supporting town centres for a range of uses. The approach would also place Straiton in the retail hierarchy as a defined "commercial centre". The MIR includes identification and promotion of a strategic green network across the region, together with support for the aims of the Central Scotland Green Network.
- 3.7** Under **A Better Connected Place** consideration is given not just to transport but also to digital networks. On transport the preferred option is to direct new development to accessible locations and to reduce the extent of private car use by encouraging greater use of other transport modes. The MIR identifies a total of nine 'strategic' transport interventions of which the following four are relevant to Midlothian:

Improvements to A720 Edinburgh City Bypass
Edinburgh Orbital Bus with associated Park and Ride facilities

Edinburgh tram work extensions to Dalkeith and other parts of the region
Strategic network of walking and cycling routes along key corridors and between settlements

On broadband, the MIR is definitive in stating that locations without connections to high speed broadband networks would not be suitable for large scale development, particularly housing.

- 3.8** In relation to **Delivery** the MIR identifies the challenges of resource constraints to deliver key infrastructure and affordable housing. In seeking to meet that challenge the MIR suggests a preferred strategy of establishing a strategic infrastructure fund comprising a mix of public sector forward funding, private sources of finance and a system of region wide developer contributions. A similar approach is suggested towards the securing and use of developer contributions to fund strategic transport projects.

4.0 Report Implications

4.1 Resources

Each constituent Council of the Strategic Development Planning Authority pays a standard annual contribution to meet the running costs of the Authority. The implications of the content of this report can be contained within that budget.

4.2 Risk

Failure on the part of the Authority to prepare a strategic development plan would contravene the relevant town and country planning legislation. Failure to keep the strategic development plan up to date would result in there being an inadequate strategic planning context for local development planning in the region.

4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

Adult health care and housing
Sustainable growth

4.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

The MIR provides the strategic planning context which underlies any land use implications arising from the key priorities. In addition it provides a positive incentive in the areas of maximising economic development, meeting housing need, and protecting/enhancing natural and heritage resources.

4.5 Impact on Performance and Outcome

An effective planning service requires to operate within an up to date and relevant strategic planning context.

4.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach

See paragraphs 4.2 and 4.5 above.

4.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The preparation process for the MIR has included consultation with communities and other stakeholders. The formal consultation on the MIR will take place over the period from 21 July to 15 September 2015.

4.8 Ensuring Equalities

The MIR is accompanied by an Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment.

4.9 Supporting Sustainable Development

Sustainable economic development is a central theme of the MIR.

4.10 IT Issues

None.

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 It is recommended that Council:-

- i) ratifies the decision of the Strategic Development Planning Authority for Edinburgh and South East Scotland to approve the South East Scotland Strategic Development Plan No. 2: Main Issues Report for publication and public consultation along with its associated documents comprising the Monitoring Statement, the Interim Environmental Report, and the Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment; and
- ii) requires the submission of further reports to Council at the remaining key statutory stages in the preparation of the Strategic Development Plan.

Date 5th June 2015

Report Contact: Ian Johnson, Head of Communities and Economy
Tel No. 0131 271 3460 ian.johnson@midlothian.gov.uk

Background Papers: None