August 2015

Overall Housing Provision and Distribution

Core Strategy Single Issue Review (SIR)

and

Sites Allocation Local Plan (SALP)

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why do we need more homes?

The population of Forest Heath is steadily growing, and the council must plan for growth based on the best available information. Between now and 2031 we will need more homes for:

- people who live here and want to stay here – including people getting older who may want smaller or specialist housing;
- the children of today who will want to live and work in the area;
- single people - more people are living on their own, either through choice or change of circumstances;
- people moving here, including for work or to set up businesses;
- people moving here to retire.

We are consulting on two documents:

- one that plans for a total number of new homes;
- and sets out options for how they might be spread around the district; and
- the second which shows the sites that have been put forward for development in each of the market towns, key service centres, and primary villages.

In the absence of a local plan that identifies and allocates land for housing, developers can choose sites on which to put forward planning applications. Without a supply of land identified in a Local Plan, it would be difficult to refuse applications, even if people may think they are on inappropriate sites.

Q. How did the council decide how many homes we need?

The evidence for the total number of open market and affordable homes needed in the plan period is gathered through the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), which is undertaken with neighbouring councils, and through an assessment of Affordable Housing need.

The decision about how many homes should be built is subject to public consultation.

Q. How did the council work out which towns and villages should have high or low levels of growth? Why should villages that have already had a lot of growth have more development?

The underlying principle is that development should be sustainable and deliverable. Forest Heath's Core Strategy Policy CS1 sets out a hierarchy of settlements that can accommodate growth. Market towns, (Newmarket, Brandon and Mildenhall) are at the top of the hierarchy as they have the most services, shops and facilities. Lakenheath and Red Lodge, which are classed as key service centres, follow market towns as they also have good levels of services and facilities. The next level in the hierarchy is primary villages, which are larger villages with some day-to-day services and facilities. These are: Beck Row, Exning, Kentford and West Row.

In considering the land that is available for development in and around the settlements, we have taken into account the environmental and policy constraints that affect whether the land can be developed. For example, Brandon is surrounded by land that is protected from development for environmental reasons, and Newmarket has policies that ensure land remains available for the horse racing industry.

Some villages have had growth in recent years either through planned development, e.g. Red Lodge (through the masterplan), or because the council does not have a five year supply of housing land (which allows housing development to go ahead in line with national policy - the National Planning Policy Framework – NPPF). We have looked at each settlement individually, and have suggested levels of growth that most closely fit the combination of all these things, that is: the size of the settlement and level of services and facilities available, the land available for development, the constraints that may prevent development, and the recent planning history of growth. If a town or village is considered to be sustainable – that is it has a reasonable level of services and facilities, and the land is available for housing growth, we must consider the possibility of further growth at this early stage in the plan making process, and include this in the consultation.

Q. How will existing infrastructure and services cope and what new infrastructure and services will be provided to support the growth?

Forest Heath's Core Strategy Policy CS13, "Infrastructure and Developer Contributions", says:

> "The release of land for development will be dependent on there being sufficient capacity in the existing local infrastructure to meet the additional requirements arising from new development. Suitable arrangements will be put in place to improve infrastructure, services, and community facilities, where necessary, to mitigate the impact of development.
>
> New development will be required to demonstrate that it will not harm the District's ability to improve the educational attainment, the accessibility to services, jobs, health and community safety, the biodiversity and well-being of Forest Heath communities."

This policy indicates the type of infrastructure required, and also sets out how developers will be expected to contribute to the cost of new or improved infrastructure.

The Council is already working closely with the relevant agencies to ensure that the exact infrastructure requirements of specific sites can be understood. Infrastructure and service providers were consulted and involved in the early work on the documents, and helped to update the Infrastructure and Environmental Capacity Assessment (IECA) carried out by consultants in 2009. This work is set out in the draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) which is available with the consultation documents for comment. The IDP will be updated as the plans progress, and revised and updated versions of the document will be published alongside the Single Issue Review (SIR) and Site Allocations Local Plan (SALP) at the next stages of consultation.

Q. Why are there so many sites put forward for development? Will they all be developed?

The Government requires all councils to maintain a five year supply of land that can be developed for housing. An essential part of trying to achieve this is the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). The SHLAA process invites everyone, including landowners and developers, to put sites forward for consideration.

The Site Allocation Local Plan includes all the SHLAA sites that are considered capable of development even if they currently have constraints, for example, the site is in an environmentally protected area. This is so that we can find out if any of the sites with such constraints can be developed if certain measures are carried out (this is called "mitigation"). However, even if sites are capable of being developed, not all of them (shown in the SHLAA as deferred) will come forward.

Q. Why are there four options for sharing the growth around the towns and villages in Forest Heath?

The Council is required to test 'reasonable alternatives' for growth, and using all the information available, we have to come up with different ways of spreading the housing growth around the towns, key service centres and primary villages. The result is four different ways of achieving the growth we know we need to plan for, and which we conclude are reasonable alternatives to test. At the end of the consultation period we will assess all the responses and will develop a Preferred Option that will be the subject of consultation early in 2016. The Preferred Option may not look like any of the four options currently being consulted on, and could be a combination of some or all of them. At each stage in the process the options will be tested through the Sustainability Appraisal.

Q. Can I suggest a different option for sharing the housing growth in the district?

Yes, but please provide evidence on how this will be deliverable (that is, demonstrate the availability of land, and constraints on development).

Q. What will happen to planning applications that are submitted before these documents are finalised?

Planning applications will be considered using Core Strategy and Joint Development Management Policies, saved policies from the 1995 local plan, and national planning policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

As the SIR and SALP progress through the Preferred Options stage and (especially) the Submission stage, the options and policies in them will carry more weight. But for the time being the housing growth policy in the NPPF takes precedence.

Q: Why is the council consulting on two separate documents?

The two documents do two different jobs. The Overall Housing Provision and Distribution document is a Single Issue Review (SIR) of one policy (Core Strategy Policy CS7) in the Forest Heath Core Strategy that was the subject of a legal challenge. As a result, the council is developing a new policy to replace the original Core Strategy Policy CS7. The final version of this document will set out the number of houses which need to be planned for in the whole of the district up to 2031, and how this number of new houses will be spread out around the district. This Issues and Options document is a first stage in the SIR consultation setting out options for the number of houses which need to be planned for, and options for how these could be spread out around the towns, key service centres, and primary villages. We would like your views on which towns and villages should grow, and by how much.

The second document is the Sites Allocation Local Plan (SALP), which lists the sites that have been included in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) for each of the market towns, key service centres and primary villages. At this Issues and Options stage you can comment on all the sites, including those that have been deferred in the SHLAA (for example because the site is within the Special Protection Area). The Site Allocations document also includes sites proposed as being suitable for employment and mixed uses. This detailed document gives separate maps and information for each town or village and for individual sites. It is important to note that not all the sites will necessarily be taken forward to the next stage.

Q. What is the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment?

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) identifies and assesses the development potential of possible sites for future housing development. Some sites are described as 'deferred' – this means that there is something that currently prevents the site being developed, for example it is in the area designated for special protection (this is particularly the case around Brandon). The sites assessed as being 'included' will be considered separately through the site allocations process.

Q. Will every site put forward be allocated for development?

No, not every suggested site will be allocated. All the sites that are considered to be developable have been included in the Site Allocations consultation process even if they are shown as 'deferred' in the SHLAA, as this consultation may result in evidence being provided that the reason for a site being deferred can be overcome. This consultation is your opportunity to say which sites you would prefer to see developed, and why. At the end of the consultation period the council will consider all the responses from the public, landowners, and other stakeholders, and will re-assess the sites and produce a Preferred Options document for consultation early in 2016.

Q. What is a Sustainability Appraisal, and what does it do?

The two documents being consulted on are accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal Report (SA Report), which incorporates the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). This SA/SEA is carried out at, and will accompany each stage of the plan making process. So there will be further SA/SEA reports at the Preferred Options and Submission stages of preparing these Local Plans.

The SA/SEA has been prepared to comply with planning law and the requirements of a European Directive. The SA process identifies and reports on the likely significant effects of the policies and proposals in the plan. It also assesses whether the plan will achieve the objectives of sustainable development. In short the SA will help ensure that the SIR and SALP will make an effective contribution to sustainable development in the district. The SA Report is available for comment with the SIR and SALP.