

CABINET – 19 OCTOBER 2010

OXFORDSHIRE MINERALS AND WASTE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: CORE STRATEGY – PREFERRED MINERALS STRATEGY

Report by Interim Head of Sustainable Development

Introduction

1. The Minerals and Waste Development Framework will set out how minerals will be supplied and waste managed in the county. It will consist of a Core Strategy that sets out the vision and strategic objectives, together with the spatial strategy, core policies and implementation framework. Detailed site allocations will be dealt with in a supporting document informed by a local assessment of need.
2. This report summarises the work undertaken to produce the spatial strategy. It recommends a preferred strategy direction and a programme for the next steps in preparation of the Core Strategy.

Minerals Strategy Principles

3. The guiding principles that will underpin the minerals strategy have been drawn up following a process of consultation and discussion with the Minerals and Waste Plan Working Group, as set out in Annex 1.
4. The strategy needs to take into account the spatial priorities for growth, to minimise the adverse impact of working on communities and reduce its impact on the transport system. The Oxfordshire Local Investment Plan (2010-2030) identifies the main locations for growth as Bicester, Oxford and the Science Vale area which includes Didcot, Wantage and Grove. These locations will account for the majority of growth across Oxfordshire and will therefore generate the greatest demand for aggregates. They are also the parts of the county where there will be the greatest concentration of demand from repair and renewal of existing development.
5. In addition the strategy will need to take into account movements of aggregates across the county boundary, such as soft sand to the Swindon area and sand and gravel to the Reading area.

Current Pattern of Mineral Working

6. Over the last 10 to 15 years, sharp sand and gravel working has been focussed on Eynsham/Cassington/Yarnton, Stanton Harcourt (Lower Windrush Valley), Sutton Courtenay, Sutton Wick and Caversham. It has

become more concentrated in the West Oxfordshire areas as reserves have declined in areas south of Oxford.

7. Soft sand working is mainly concentrated between Oxford and Faringdon. The main limestone working areas are to the south of Burford, near Ardley and in conjunction with soft sand working. Ironstone is worked to the north west of Banbury, where there are large reserves with permission remaining to be worked.

Development and Assessment of Spatial Strategy Options

8. In February 2010 we consulted key stakeholders on initial spatial strategy options. These were revised in the light of that consultation, and a second round of consultation carried out in July 2010. These consultations and the output from them are summarised in Annex 2.
9. The revised options, as shown diagrammatically in Annex 3, are:

Sand and gravel:

1. Concentrate working in four existing areas of working: Lower Windrush Valley; Eynsham / Cassington / Yarnton; Radley; and Sutton Courtenay;
2. Concentrate working in some or all of the following new areas, moving away from existing areas of working during the plan period: Clanfield / Bampton; Sutton / Stanton Harcourt; Clifton Hampden / Wittenham; Benson / Shillingford / Warborough; and Cholsey;
3. Disperse working across the resource areas, including all the existing and new areas as well as three other existing areas: Finmere; Faringdon; and Caversham.

Soft sand:

Three areas: around Duns Tew; south east of Faringdon; and the Tubney / Marcham / Hinton Waldrist area.

Crushed rock:

Three areas of existing working: north of Bicester to the east of the River Cherwell; south of the A40 near Burford; and south east of Faringdon (associated with soft sand extraction).

10. We have carried out a technical assessment of the options, as shown at Annex 4. A sustainability appraisal of the options has also been carried out; the report has been published on the County Council's website and is at Annex 5. These assessments have raised a number of issues about the sand and gravel option areas, which are listed at Annex 6.

Testing the Options

11. Following revocation of the South East Plan in July 2010, current government guidance is that the County Council should prepare its strategy on the basis of the apportionment figures in the "Proposed Changes" to Policy M3, March 2010. This sets a figure of 2.1 million tonnes a year of sand and gravel for Oxfordshire, which the County Council has previously opposed. However, the guidance allows planning authorities to use alternative figures if they have new or different information and a robust evidence base.
12. Consultants are being commissioned to provide an assessment of the local aggregate need. This will be completed by December 2010 and will provide the evidence base on which to justify an alternative figure.
13. In the interim, the spatial options have been tested against a range of possible supply requirements. For the purpose of preparing the spatial strategy, the key question is whether differences in the overall level of need have fundamental implications for the spatial strategy.
14. The figures in Annex 7 show that all options are potentially capable of accommodating the range of supply requirements considered. As a consequence the identification of a preferred spatial strategy can be policy led.

Recommendation of Minerals and Waste Plan Working Group

15. The spatial strategy options set out in paragraph 9 were discussed by the Minerals and Waste Plan Working Group on 27 September 2010. The note of this meeting is at Annex 8. The recommendation of the Working Group is that the County Council's preferred spatial strategy for mineral working should be:
 - (a) Sand and gravel – based on option 1: concentrate extraction at existing areas of working: Lower Windrush Valley; Eynsham / Cassington / Yarnton; Radley; Sutton Courtenay; and Caversham; this would provide clarity in the short to medium term, but the ability of these areas to provide for the medium to longer term should be assessed in light of the work to determine local need; and flexibility may be needed to consider new areas in the longer term;
 - (b) Soft sand – working in three existing areas: south east of Faringdon; Tubney / Marcham / Hinton Waldrist; and Duns Tew;
 - (c) Crushed rock – working in three existing areas: north of Bicester to the east of the River Cherwell; south of the A40 near Burford; and south east of Faringdon.
16. The Working Group's recommendation provides a clear statement of intent in terms of the preferred spatial strategy. Given that the current level of existing permissions is sufficient to meet need in the short to medium term it also provides a basis for responding to pressures in the short to medium term.

17. Further mineral extraction within existing working areas could be secured through extensions to existing sites and/or new sites. The ability of existing sand and gravel areas to provide for the longer term will need to be assessed in light of the outcome of the assessment of local need and, if needed, consideration given to the inclusion of new areas of working, taking into account proximity to markets.

Next Steps

18. With work on the assessment of local need due to be completed by the end of December, the Working Group recommend that the next stage in the process should be a consultation that brings together the preferred spatial strategy, the local assessment of need and draft minerals policies into a single document.
19. The timetable for taking this forward is as follows:
- | | |
|---------------|---|
| December 2010 | Assessment of local need completed; |
| January 2011 | Minerals and Waste Plan Working Group consider implications of assessment and draft mineral policies; |
| February 2011 | Cabinet to consider draft minerals Core Strategy; |
| Spring 2011 | Consultation on draft minerals Core Strategy; |
20. Work on the waste element of the Framework will be taken during the first half of 2011. This will enable the Minerals and Waste Core Strategy to be published for formal representations by the end of 2011. Submission to the Secretary of State will take place in early 2012.

Comments of the Growth and Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee

21. The Scrutiny Committee reviewed the work on the minerals spatial strategy at its meeting on 6 October. In supporting the recommendation of the Working Group the Committee emphasised the importance of maximising the use of recycled aggregates as a means of reducing the need for primary aggregates. In addition the Committee welcomed the work on the assessment of local need and stressed the importance of ensuring flexibility in supply to meet changes in demand.

Financial and Staff Implications

22. The programme of work set out to the Working Group is included within the Directorate work priorities. There are no additional financial or staffing implications as a result of the proposals in this paper.

Risk Management

23. The Minerals and Waste Development Framework is a high risk project. The complexity of the process, the potential implications for major mineral working and waste management proposals emphasise of the importance of good project management and regular reporting on risk management.

RECOMMENDATION

24. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**
- (a) agree the guiding principles for the minerals strategy (paragraphs 3 to 5 of Annex 1);**
 - (b) agree that the County Council's preferred approach for mineral working in the short to medium term is:**
 - (i) sand and gravel – concentration of working in existing areas of working, at Lower Windrush Valley, Eynsham / Cassington / Yarnton, Radley, Sutton Courtenay and Caversham, subject to the ability of these areas to provide for the medium to longer term being re-assessed when the requirement for sand and gravel supply has been established and consideration being given to new areas of working if the re-assessment indicates this is necessary;**
 - (ii) soft sand – working in three existing areas: south east of Faringdon; Tubney / Marcham / Hinton Waldrist; and Duns Tew;**
 - (iii) crushed rock – working in three existing areas: north of Bicester to the east of the River Cherwell; south of the A40 near Burford; and south east of Faringdon;**
 - (c) agree the next steps set out in paragraph 19 of this report, including public consultation on the preferred minerals strategy in spring 2011.**

MARTIN TUGWELL
Interim Head of Sustainable Development

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Peter Day, Tel 01865 815544

September 2010