

Stratford District Council's Core Strategy

The level and rate of house building in our area has in recent years been determined by the district council's Local Plan, which in turn based its development programme on centrally set targets. The current position is that the Stratford-on-Avon District Local Plan review expired on 14 July 2009. However, most of the old policies and proposals it contained have been 'saved' and will continue to be applied.

To replace the Local Plan the council now has to come up with a Local Development Framework (LDF). This will guide development until 2028 and will consist of a series of documents, each one having a different scope and purpose. However, it will have the same objective of setting planning policy for the District and setting house building targets. Additionally it will look at commercial and retail development.

Initial work on the LDF was guided by Regional Spatial Strategies: Stratford district's house building target from 2006 to 2026 was initially recommended to be set at 5,600. An Independent Panel reviewed the position and recommended 7,500 with the possibility of more in the last 5 years of the plan period.

However, when the new coalition government took power in May 2010 one of the first things they did was to announce the abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategies. It was through these that the previous government had tried to control the level and rate of development, laying down targets for house building numbers for each area of the country. Although their abolition was challenged in the courts the government has made it quite clear that they will go.

A new approach to house building numbers and other development issues has had to be taken, with the council commissioning a number of studies from consultants. The first document in the LDF being prepared is the Core Strategy. This will establish a long-term vision for the District, the key objectives and the policies for achieving them. The council sees the Core Strategy's main purposes as addressing the following questions:

- Where should new homes be built and new jobs located?
- How can we meet the housing needs of local people?
- How can we reduce the impacts of climate change?
- How can we make sure everyone can reach the services they need?
- How do we protect our rich heritage and landscape?

So far:

- A consultation exercise on major issues was carried out in May/June 2007.
- A first Draft Core Strategy was published in November 2008.
- A consultation paper was produced in July 2009 setting out three possible plans for house building numbers and outlined some possible development options to meet these scenarios.
- In February 2010 the Council published another Consultation Core Strategy which, amongst other things, looked at possible sites for future development.

It was after this stage that the new government abolished the RSS and with it the previous guidance on house numbers.

The future timetable:

- A third draft of the Core Strategy will be published for consultation in January-March 2012
- A 'submission draft' of the Core Strategy will then be published (but not before) before August 2012.
- There will then be further consultation before the Core Strategy is submitted to the Secretary of State in November 2012.
- An independent Inspector will then consider all the representations and there will be an Examination in Public. The Inspector will decide whether the Core Strategy is 'sound' with a view to adoption by late Spring 2013.

So what's wrong with this?

The Liberal Democrats have a number of concerns with the Conservatives' proposals:

1. The timetable.

Without a Core Strategy in place developers who wish to build are in a much stronger position. Government policy, due to be in place by April 2012, says that after this date any development in line with national policy will be approved if the local plan is out of date. This means developers are likely to get planning permission in some cases even where there is strong opposition.

The original intention of the council was to complete the Core Strategy by December 2012. However, at the Council Meeting in October the Conservatives proposed extending that deadline until May 2013. Minute 365 of the meeting shows that Conservatives voted through the extension, despite attempts by the Lib Dems to stick to the original timetable.

2. The number of houses proposed.

The council commissioned consultants to prepare a report on housing need in the district. This report, available on the council's website, shows that between 2008 and 2028 1880 houses would be needed to cope with local demand, assuming no net migration into or out of the district.

Yet the Conservatives opted for a house building programme of 8,000 houses over this period.

Just after the general election in May 2010 they had attacked 7,500 as being 'far too many'.

3. Locations.

Most of our market towns have seen substantial expansion in recent years. The Liberal Democrats believe that if significant extra house numbers are accepted, the option of a new settlement should be seriously explored.