Edinburgh & South East Scotland Strategic Development Plan

Report by Ian L Young, Director, Strategic Services Division

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet endorsement of a recommendation made by the Interim Edinburgh and South East Scotland Strategic Development Plan Joint Committee (the Interim Joint Committee) regarding the appointment of a project manager to take forward the preparation of the Strategic Development Plan (SDP) for the Edinburgh city region.

1.2 The opportunity is also taken to update Cabinet on progress with the arrangements for replacing the Edinburgh and the Lothians Structure Plan 2015 (ELSP) with the proposed SDP, in line with the new statutory requirements of the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006.

2 Report Summary

2.1 In March 2007, Scottish Ministers approved the abandonment of the Structure Plan Review 2020 in favour of refocusing resources on early work for the preparation of the SDP for the wider Edinburgh city region. This is partly in recognition of the fact that the strategic planning context has changed since the Planning Bill received Royal Assent in December 2006.

2.2 The secondary legislation to implement the various requirements of the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 should be in place by late 2008. A report will be brought to Cabinet in October this year in response to consultation on the draft designation order and statutory guidance relating to the Strategic Development Planning Authority for the Edinburgh city region.

2.3 A Steering Group of senior officers from the six constituent authorities has been considering options for undertaking preparatory work in advance of the publication of formal SDP regulations. The group considers that it is now necessary to appoint a dedicated temporary project manager if sustained progress is to be made and early delivery of the SDP is to be achieved.

3 Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
   a) notes progress with the arrangements and early work programme for the preparation of the Strategic Development Plan for Edinburgh and South East Scotland, which will replace the ELSP 2015 in due course; and
   b) agrees to the appointment of a project manager initially for 1 year which, subject to review, may be extended to 3 years to drive forward the preparation of the SDP, as recommended by the Steering Group and Interim Joint Committee.

Ian L Young
Director
30 August 2007
4 Report Implications

Resource Implications:

4.1 Cabinet has previously been alerted to the fact that implementation of the new statutory requirements of the Planning Act will have substantial staffing and financial resource implications. These remain difficult to quantify but, insofar as the Strategic Development Planning Authority requirements are concerned, the costs should be shared equally between the six partner Councils. To date, no additional resources have been forthcoming from the Scottish Government.

4.2 As a start, SDP project management costs have been assessed as around £90,000 per annum (to include funding for the Green Belt Study (c. £32,000), other early consultancy work and incidentals). Each Council’s share is £15,000 for 2007/08 which can be met from the Divisional budget. However, no budget allocation to extend the post to a 3-year appointment or undertake other essential consultancy work has been made for future years and this will require to be taken into account in the 2008/09 budget deliberations. Budgetary provision for this post in subsequent years (and a dedicated or virtual SDP team) requires to be considered in the context of the wider implementation of the new legislation.

Risk Implications:

4.3 The recommendations of this report contribute towards reducing identified service, Divisional and strategic risks relating to the implementation of the requirements of the Planning Act. Appointment of a jointly-funded project manager, and the application of an appropriate project management regime, represents an important step towards implementing the work programme for the preparation of the SDP within an acceptable timescale.

Policy Implications

4.4 Strategy: This report contributes significantly to the achievement of Divisional priorities relating to the review of the ELSP 2015, the introduction of city region plans, and implementing the new statutory requirements arising from the Planning Act. Satisfactory project management is key to the early and successful delivery of the development strategy for Edinburgh and South East Scotland. The proposal also contributes towards the corporate aim of making the best use of resources.

4.5 Consultation: This is not considered relevant in connection with this report.

4.6 Equalities: This report is not proposing new/revised services, policies, strategies, or plans and therefore is not assessed for equalities implications.

4.7 Sustainability: The report makes no direct contribution to the delivery of sustainable development. However, the SDP will be subject to the statutory Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) requirements. It will in due course form the basis for the Local Development Plan (LDP) for Midlothian as a replacement for the Midlothian Local Plan currently under scrutiny at Inquiry. The LDP will also be subject to the SEA requirements.

Report Contact: Janice Long
Tel No 0131 271 3461
Background papers: File 1685 vol.1
5 Background

5.1 The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 provides the statutory framework for the replacement of the existing suite of structure plans across Scotland with strategic development plans for the four city regions only (Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee). Secondary legislation is required to give effect to the new regime and formal commencement of SDP preparation must await the necessary designation orders and guidance. Consultation on the draft orders is underway and a report will be brought to Cabinet in October.

5.2 In anticipation of the new context for city region planning in South East Scotland, a Steering Group comprising senior officers from the six constituent authorities (Lothian Councils plus Fife and Scottish Borders) has been considering options for undertaking preparatory work in advance of the publication of formal SDP regulations. This is considered prudent in its own right, but the need for early progress has been reinforced by the terms of the Scottish Ministers’ letter agreeing to the abandonment of the Edinburgh and the Lothians Structure Plan Review 2020. A copy of the Ministerial letter is attached as Appendix 1. This requires the submission of the SDP within 2 years of the commencement order, which is anticipated in October 2008.

5.3 Transitional governance arrangements have also been put in place. Although the Edinburgh and the Lothians Structure Plan Joint Liaison Committee (the Joint Liaison Committee) still conducts ELSP-related business, a new Interim Edinburgh and South East Scotland Strategic Development Plan Joint Committee (the Interim Joint Committee) has been formed to deal with SDP-related matters and oversee joint working between the six authorities. There is equal Member representation on this Committee and it is serviced, as is the Joint Liaison Committee, on a rotational basis (currently East Lothian Council). A copy of the minutes of the first two meetings of the Interim Joint Committee are attached as Appendices 2 and 3.

5.4 The Steering Group, which reports to this Committee, considers that it is now necessary to appoint a dedicated project manager if meaningful and sustained progress is to be made in preparing for the implementation of the new regulations, and early delivery of the SDP is to be achieved. The Interim Joint Committee considered a verbal report on the project management arrangements at its meeting on 26 June 2007. It agreed to delegate the appointment of a project manager to officers from the member Councils. However, that decision now needs to be endorsed by each of the constituent authorities.

5.5 It is recommended that approval be given to the appointment of a temporary project manager, initially for 1 year but renewable up to 3 years, subject to review. The role is to lead and drive forward the preparatory work on the SDP. The focus for the first year will be project management on Prince 2 principles and the investigation and production of a paper setting out options for the future governance, staffing and resourcing of an SDP team. A decision has still to be taken as to whether this will be a dedicated or virtual team (Cabinet will have the opportunity to comment on proposals for a dedicated team in October). It is anticipated that the preferred candidate will be either an experienced planner with a sound knowledge of project management techniques or a project manager with experience of working within a planning environment.
5.6 It is recommended that the post is graded at around PO4-PO5 with the exact scale and placement being determined by the employing authority who would also provide accommodation. The project manager would be employed on a temporary contract. The total cost of the appointment, including travel and associated costs, would be around £45,000 per annum. It is further recommended that the costs are shared equally by the six partner authorities requiring a contribution of £7,500 per annum from each. In addition, a modest budget (a further £7,500 per annum from each) is required for early consultancy work and incidentals. In the first instance, this will mainly be used to fund the Green Belt Study which is already underway (refer to paragraph 5.10 below).

5.7 Midlothian Council’s share of the project management and consultancy costs for the current financial year can be met from the Divisional budget. However, the Divisional budget will not be able to absorb these costs in subsequent years and there is no budget allocation for 2008/09 and 2009/10. The funding for this post in the longer term, together with the resources required for an SDP team (whether dedicated or virtual), need to be considered in the context of the wider staffing and financial implications arising from the reform of the planning system. The timetable for implementation of the key changes arising from the Planning Act is determined by the introduction of secondary legislation and guidance being rolled out over the next 18 months.

5.8 There is still a substantial question remaining over what financial provision might be made by the Scottish Government towards the costs of implementation.

5.9 Finally, reference was made in paragraph 5.2 above to the Scottish Ministers’ agreement in March to the abandonment of ELSP Structure Plan Review 2020 in favour of refocusing resources on an early work programme for the SDP. They requested that a succinct overview of recent and planned house building in Edinburgh and the Lothians be submitted to them by July 2007, which should also address the planning constraints which inhibit progress. This was jointly prepared and submitted as requested.

5.10 A further piece of early work initiated to inform the preparation of the SDP is a study of the capacity of the Green Belt to absorb future development without undermining the objectives of new national policy guidance set out in SPP21 Green Belts. The Joint Liaison Committee confirmed support for this study in March 2007 and agreed to tender for the work which will take around 9 months to complete. In June, the Interim Joint Committee agreed to appoint Land Use Consultants to undertake the work at a cost of £31,765 and that the cost of the study would be divided equally between the six partner authorities and Scottish Natural Heritage who had agreed to contribute to the study costs as an equal partner.
Dear Mr Collins

EDINBURGH AND THE LOTHIANS STRUCTURE PLAN REVIEW 2020
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF ABANDONMENT

I refer to Ian Glen’s letter dated 24 January 2007, sent on behalf of the Edinburgh and the Lothians Structure Plan Joint Liaison Committee, seeking the approval of Scottish Ministers for the abandonment of the current review of the above named plan.

Ministers have considered the arguments put forward for abandoning the review and refocusing on early work for the strategic development plan for the wider city region. They consider that the planning context has changed significantly since 2004 and agree that circumstances mean that preparation of the structure plan review is unlikely to be possible in the timescale set out in the 2004 approval letter. Therefore, subject to the caveats below, Ministers are content that the current review process is abandoned.

Housing land supply is a crucial issue in the Edinburgh city region. Although it is your view that monitoring and action processes are in place to ensure that the existing structure plan can deliver sufficient housing land in the short term, it will be essential that the new strategic development plan makes more land available in line with identified need in the area. In the meantime, Ministers remain concerned about the pace of delivery of housing land in the area and are particularly keen to see the early resolution of the difficulties that have delayed development in the South East Wedge. They expect authorities to closely monitor the situation and, if necessary, release additional land in line with the maintenance of the five-year land supply requirements of Policy HOU 10 in the approved structure plan. They also expect that authorities will do all they can to ensure that houses and, in particular, affordable housing units are developed on allocated sites.

To emphasise the importance that Ministers attach to this issue, we expect the Councils, following discussion with the house-building industry, to submit by July a succinct overview of recent and planned housebuilding in Edinburgh and Lothians, and proposals for the release of land overcoming planning constraints which inhibit progress on the provision of new housing. As you already undertake an annual housing land audit process and prepare an annual housing monitor, there would be merit in this overview being updated every year to ensure the issue of housing is kept in clear
focus as the new strategic development plan is prepared. If necessary, the Chief Planner will convene a meeting to follow up the overview.

The new strategic development plan should be used to provide greater opportunities for the more effective delivery of housing land in sustainable locations. Therefore, early work for this new plan must start immediately. It is expected that formal preparation of the strategic development plan can commence in 2008 once the relevant provisions in the new Planning Act have been commenced and secondary legislation is in place. The authorities should project managing preparation of the plan to a tight timetable and it must be submitted to Ministers within 2 years of commencement of the provisions in the Act.

The Joint Liaison Committee should be aware of the need to manage the risk of working with Fife and Scottish Borders Councils ahead of the formal confirmation of the designation order for the strategic development planning authorities. The draft designation order which will confirm which authorities are to work together to prepare the new strategic development plans is due to be published for consultation later this year.

Yours sincerely

KEN JOBLING
Principal Planner