



PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

INDIVIDUAL DECISION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR PLANNING AND TRANSPORT

TOPIC – DRAFT PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE NOTE 4: PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

The Access to Information Procedure Rules – Part 4, Section 22 of the Council's Constitution provides for a decision to be made by an individual member of Cabinet.

In accordance with the Procedure Rules, the Corporate Director (Governance), the Chief Executive and the Head of Finance are consulted together with Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Principal Scrutiny Committee and all Members of the relevant Scrutiny Panel (individual Ward Members are consulted separately where appropriate). In addition, all Members are notified.

Five or more of these consulted Members can require that the matter be referred to Cabinet for determination.

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SUMMARY

The Government has recently issued draft new planning guidance on economic development for consultation until 17th March 2008. The draft guidance is entitled Planning Policy Statement 4 (PPS4): 'Planning for Sustainable Economic Development'. When adopted, this will replace the existing guidance: Planning Policy Guidance 4 (PPG4): 'Industrial, Commercial Development and Small Firms'.

Draft PPS4 was proposed following the Barker Review of Planning (2006), which considered that planning authorities did not take sufficient account of the needs of business. The retention of old employment site designations, when they could be released for other forms of development – especially housing, was a particular concern. The draft guidance has this ethos very much in mind. Additionally, it was considered appropriate that PPG4 should be updated, as it was published in 1992, to reflect changes in policy that have occurred since that time, such as in relation to sustainable development. Key themes of the proposed new guidance are flexibility and the use of market signals and the preparation of a firm evidence base for planning decisions.

The main points of draft PPS4 are as follows:

- Housing is included in the list of activities defined as 'economic development' as is telecommunications development and transport uses related to freight terminals.
- Authorities should undertake employment land reviews
- Flexibility – authorities should identify a variety of sites to cater for a range of employment uses and business types, from small start-up businesses to larger commercial and industrial users. Land assembly may be required.
- The designation of sites for single or restricted uses classes should be limited.
- Where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for economic development, wider employment uses or alternative uses 'such as housing' should be actively considered.
- Make the most efficient and effective use of land and buildings. Prioritise the use of previously developed land. Encourage new uses for vacant or derelict buildings, particularly historic buildings or buildings in rural areas.
- Account should be taken of the price differentials between land allocated to different use classes, when deciding on the most productive use of land.
- Car parking standards to be maximum standards and set at the local level
- Local planning authorities should ensure that development is durable and sustainable and delivers attractive and healthy working environments. This will assist in attracting business and potential employees to an area.
- Environmentally sensitive locations should be safeguarded from telecommunications development. Mast and site-sharing should be encouraged.
- Full consideration should be given to the economic aspects of proposals alongside social and environmental aspects. Proposals should be considered favourably unless the economic and/or environmental costs of development are likely to outweigh the benefits. Authorities should take into account the longer term benefits of proposals – such as job creation or improved productivity and wider benefits to national, regional or local economies.
- Authorities should support farm diversification schemes that help sustain agricultural enterprise and are consistent in scale with their rural location and environmental impact. Sites may be acceptable even though they may not be readily accessible by public transport. Small-scale economic development should be supported where it is the most sustainable option in villages that have poor transport links with local service centres.

OFFICER COMMENTS

The need to review employment designations through employment land reviews and the greater use of evidence in economic planning reflects the approach being taken by the City Council. It is considered however, that the draft guidance note fails to recognise the role of planning in achieving a balance between economic, environmental and social factors.

One particular area of concern is the treatment of housing as 'economic development'. Housing itself is not an economic activity, but forms part of the socio-economic infrastructure of an area. It may be possible to release some sites for housing development; however this should be achieved via the employment land review and monitoring of developments. In areas where there is very high demand for housing, it can be difficult to achieve any other uses on sites and this guidance is likely to undermine policies to retain existing employment sites. This is even more so when account is taken of the advice to take account of price differentials which, in this area, will almost always favour housing or retail uses over 'traditional' employment use.

The Government has provided a questionnaire which forms the basis for consultation feedback. The officers' recommended response is appended and raises the concerns referred to above and other more minor points. The response consists of the completed questionnaire, expanded upon where necessary, and is attached as Appendix One of this Decision Notice.

Draft PPS4 is particularly relevant to the Economic Prosperity strand of the Council's Corporate Strategy: there is also some relevance to the High Quality Environment.

DECISION

That the comments set out in Appendix 1 be approved and forwarded to the Department of Communities and Local Government as the formal comments of the City Council on proposed PPS4: 'Planning for Sustainable Economic Development'

REASON FOR THE DECISION AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The Government's proposed PPS4 on 'Planning for Sustainable Economic Development' raises some issues of concern for this Council, which is it considered important to raise with the DCLG as part of the government's consultation process.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY THE DECISION MAKER OR A MEMBER OR OFFICER CONSULTED

None

DISPENSATION GRANTED BY THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

N/A

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None directly. However, land reviews tend to involve the employment of specialist consultants. The increased reliance on market information in development control may also require the occasional use of specialist advice.

Approved by: (signature)

Date of Decision

Councillor Keith Wood – Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport