

BALANCED COMMUNITIES VISION

SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE - 9 SEPTEMBER 2010

CABINET - 30 SEPTEMBER 2010

COUNCIL – 22 FEBRUARY 2011

Report of the: Community and Planning Services Director

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: Yes - significant in terms of its effects on the communities living or working in an area comprising 2 or more wards in the District.

This report supports the Key Aim of:

- (a) Creating balanced and sustainable communities in the District
- (b) Delivering the objectives of the Community Plan and Sustainable Communities Action Plan
- (c) Delivering the objectives of the Local Plan and the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF)

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Mrs. Clark

Head of Service Head of Housing Services - Mrs. Pat Smith

Recommendation:

- (a) That the Services Select Committee considers and comments on the Balanced Communities Vision 2010 - 2013, attached at Appendix A of the report
- (b) That Cabinet considers the Committee's comments, and
- (c) That Cabinet recommends that Council adopts the Balanced Communities Vision 2010 - 2013 as District Council policy.

Reason for recommendation:

Members approval required to adopt the revised Balanced Communities Vision 2010-2013.

Background

1. The South-East is the UK's largest region, with a population of about 8.1million (13.5%) of the UK total. It is also amongst the fastest growing regions. Key issues in the South-East are housing supply, affordability of housing and transport. Sevenoaks District has the highest average house prices in Kent and people find it very difficult to afford homes in the District.
2. The previous Labour Government launched the Sustainable Communities Plan (Sustainable Communities: Building for the future) in 2003. The Plan set out a long-term programme of action for delivering sustainable communities in both urban and rural areas. A sustainable community is where people want to live and work, now and in the future.
3. Within Sevenoaks District the concept of "Balanced Communities" arose from the consultation which framed the Community Plan in 2004. The first Balanced Communities Paper was published in 2006 and was updated in 2008.
4. In its report, "Housing, Building Better Lives" (2009), the Audit Commission recognised that "good housing influences people's quality of life, life expectancy and the economic and social opportunities available to them". The Vision for Balanced Communities embraces and includes the "Balanced Housing Market" theme from the South-East Regional Housing Strategy. It was also a priority highlighted in the last full CPA inspection.
5. The recent review and consultation on the Community Plan's Sustainable Communities Action Plan has identified that Balanced Communities remains a priority in the District.

Introduction

6. The District Council's Vision, attached at Appendix A, was created from the objectives in the Community Plan's Sustainable Communities Action Plan. The Vision reflects four priorities for the District including, 1) delivering local needs through the Community Plan, 2) developing balanced communities, 3) the Local Development Framework and, 4) to provide good value for money through a balanced budget.
7. The Balanced Communities Vision sets out the District Council's aims and priorities for balancing the housing market, and to create and maintain sustainable communities that will shape the future of the District.
8. The main aims of the Vision is to provide:
 - A thriving community, where there is equal opportunity and access to affordable decent homes in all tenures, education, health and leisure services, transportation and jobs;
 - A robust and effective Local Development Framework, supporting the wider economic and environmental objective to sustain communities;

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- A recognition that housing is not just about “bricks and mortar” and that vulnerable people must be supported to sustain tenancies and owner-occupation to avoid social exclusion;
 - Consideration given to ways of identifying and assisting groups of individuals who need extra support to engage with the community, for example, the young, older people and ethnic minorities;
 - Feeling safe in the community and at home, for example, providing security, adaptations and welfare benefits to enable people to stay in their own homes; and
 - Ongoing consultation to identify gaps in provision and to ensure that residents’ views drive Council policy, for example, housing needs and stock condition surveys, health needs assessments and Community Plan consultations.
9. The District Council has achieved many of the objectives referred to , but since 2006, has continued to identify gaps and review needs according to the changing environment and economic climate.
10. The Vision is linked closely with the District Council’s Community Plan and the new “Single Conversation” process, now termed Local Investment Plan. This is currently being developed with Maidstone, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils, the Home and Communities Agency (formerly the Housing Corporation) and the Kent County Council. The new process will identify priorities for each of the 4 local authorities relating to for example, housing, regeneration and community enhancement.

Key Implications

Financial

11. The Vision is delivered through the Community Plan’s Sustainable Communities Action Plan . Existing Housing budgets with external funding will deliver schemes and projects. This will be part of the Local Investment Plan process.

Community Impact and Outcomes

12. The Balanced Communities Vision’s main objective is to sustain local communities and provide a balanced housing market and is therefore, entirely community based. The Vision includes many Community development and cohesion objectives. The Vision’s main objectives are delivered through the Community Plan’s Sustainable Communities Action Plan.

Legal, Human Rights etc

13. Various legislation is tied into the sustainable communities agenda and the District Council is according with relevant law.

Resource (non-financial)

14. No further resource implications.

Value For Money and Asset Management

15. The concept of balanced communities covers several service areas in the District Council. As such, it is part of the value for money assessments for each service area. The cost of delivering objectives will be met from existing budgets or external funding.

Equality Impacts

16. The concept of Balanced Communities seeks equality of choice and to prevent any form of social exclusion. Each relevant service area undertakes equality assessments.

Sustainability Checklist

17. The Vision will assist in creating and maintaining sustainable communities.

Social Inclusion

18. The Strategy will assist to prevent social exclusion.

Conclusions

19. The Council's Balanced Communities Vision is considered "good practice" by the Department of the Communities and Local Government and when it was first introduced it was unique in Kent. It will compliment the Local Investment Plan process and it will enhance the Council's Community Plan.

Not to adopt the Balanced Communities Vision 2010-2013 will adversely affect the Local Investment Plan process which may limit the Council's ability to maximise funding.

Risk Assessment Statement

The balanced communities concept is part of the district council's vision. As such, it embraces several service areas across the district council. The resulting aims and objectives are included in the sustainable communities action plan. Therefore any risks in the actions proposed will be the responsibility of the relevant head of service who would have risk assessed the objectives in advance. Any risks would be included in the individual risk registers and rated accordingly with level of impact if risks could occur.

Background Papers:

Balanced Communities Paper 2006

Balanced Communities Update 2008

Balanced Communities Vision 2010 - 2013

Sustainable Communities Action Plan 2010 - 2013

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Council – 22 February 2011

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